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To Nannie,
from

Jack.

(Xmas 1928) -

BOOKS BY
STEPHEN CHALMERS

A PRINCE OF ROMANCE
DON QUICKSHOT
ENCHANTED CIGARETTES
FOOTLOOSE AND FREE
HOUSE OF THE TWO GREEN EYES
THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN—EDWARD LIVINGSTON TRUDEAU
THE GREATER PUNISHMENT
THE PENNY PIPER OF SARANAC
THE TRAIL OF A TENDERFOOT
THE VANISHING SMUGGLER
WHEN LOVE CALLS MEN TO ARMS
THE HERMIT THRUSH (POEMS)

HOUSE OF THE TWO GREEN EYES

BY
STEPHEN CHALMERS



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HOUSE OF THE TWO GREEN EYES

BY
STEPHEN CHATMERS



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FIRST EDITION

IN REMEMBRANCE
OF
ARTHUR GREAVES
A GREAT CITY-EDITOR

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HOUSE OF THE TWO GREEN EYES

HOUSE OF THE TWO GREEN EYES

Chapter I

THE MAELSTROM

As IF Grell were a foreign prince whose opinion on our tall buildings was essential to the continued happiness of the American people, Dayton asked the inevitable, "What do you think of our city?"

Grell did not reply at once. He stood beside his journalistic friend on the parapet of the skyscraping Sentinel Building, his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

Directly below, New York's Rialto by night swept like a comet. Its nucleus was Herald Square, its tail widening toward Longacre (recently re-named Times) Square. Theatre doors were pouring, as water from sluice gates, torrents of life and colour. Except where the Metropolitan Opera, still in the last act, held its waiting vehicles in a blinking diamond necklace strung around the block, the brilliant thoroughfare was a maelstrom of moving lights. Electric advertisements flashed, danced, and cavorted in varied hue and device. The horseless age in violent adolescence, with only an occasional horse-hansom or carriage-and-pair defying the march of vehicular history, the bright eyes of all makes, shapes, and sizes of automobiles resembled fire-

flies at a jungle's edge as they wove in and out of the traffic whirl; brightly yellow on the oncoming east side of Broadway, dimly red on the southbound west side.

"Nahum, two—four," said Grell presently. "A chap at college showed me the verse as a Biblical prophecy of the benzine buggy: *'The chariots shall rage in the streets. They shall jostle one another in the broad ways. They shall seem like torches. They shall run like lightnings.'* It's a sight!"

"Great material for a morbid poet," said Dayton with the blasé note of the hardened police reporter. "Moths-in-the-halo—many-a-heart-is-aching stuff."

Grell heard abstractedly. Over to the right, the Hudson River was a blue-gray lane mirroring black hulks and shimmering lights. Beyond that, New Jersey merged into black infinity.

But the roar of the Rialto brought Grell back to the scene immediately below. Between blazing Broadway and dim Seventh Avenue of that pre-transition period of the early nineteen hundreds, a dark triangle, spreading fanlike from its apex below the Sentinel Building, visibly reached as far south as Fourteenth Street.

"Looks like a necropolis in the heart of a Babylon," said Grell; "a river asleep on the edge of a cataract."

The newspaper man chuckled. "It may look it," said he, "but it's a river that's as deep as it's still and dark. And it's my nightly job to explore it. That, friend Grell, is the Tenderloin of New York—its tenderloin steak, if I may jump from rivers to butcher cuts. Broadway is merely its strip of fat."

"Curious," said Grell quietly, following his own

train of thought, "one seems to get nearer it up here—away from it—high above it."

"A matter of mental perspective. But you miss the detail. You've got to mix in yourself. Had enough?"

Grell shivered slightly.

"Yes," said he. "Odd, but it came to me how easily one might obey that impulse to step off this parapet into space."

"That's why there's a husky watchman and a permit attached to getting up here. Let's go."

They emerged below upon blazing, roaring Broadway. Dayton led the way southward, and Oren Grell, lately of Cornell, followed with the passive docility of one on the heels of a professional tutor. He ventured little speech, knowing instinctively that the newspaperman was bored, that he was trying to make the best of a rotten assignment. Dickie Dayton—only his parents had ever called him Richard—had had a similar assignment so often. He was "Tenderloin man" for the *Sentinel*. When a friend of any friend of any member of the editorial staff arrived in town it was Dayton who was elected to show him around that New York which is all of New York to all but the New Yorker. Usually he succeeded in meeting the guest's preconceived notions, and not infrequently put him to bed in a hotel room and carried his own less befogged brain to his bachelor rooms in West Forty-fifth Street.

But Grell, he had to allow, was a little different. At least, his father was—must be. Grell, senior, a well-to-do banker of Rochester, had a theory which he had summed up to his son a week before.

"Son," he had said, "I've educated you as education

is understood. But your education isn't finished. You've got to see life before you take to banking. You've got to learn the difference between a poor man whose word is good and the rich piker whose bond isn't. Here are two thousand dollars to start with. You can have a thousand at the beginning of every quarter until you're through. But two years is your limit, Son, and mine. I'd advise you to see New York first, America second, and, after that, as much of the rest of the world as you may fancy giving the once-over. And don't be any more of a fool than the average."

A letter of introduction from Peter Grell to the *Sentinel's* managing editor (they had sailed paper boats on Lake Erie when the world was young) led to Dayton.

In the newspaperman the Cornell graduate found a cross between a gentleman and a sinner. They were of similar age, but during two years the Tenderloin police reporter had consumed fruit of knowledge which makes for experience without thinning or graying the hair. He had moved in the drama without being a part of it.

This newspaper person seemed to know some representative of every human variety of midnight New York. As he walked southward toward the police precinct house in West Thirtieth Street—the old Tenderloin station—he waved a casual hand, raised a hat, returned a quip, or cracked a jest with men and women who were mysteries to the young man from Rochester. He chirped "*pou-poule*" to a *chic* little thing who carried a handbag and seemed to be bound nowhere

with the carefully assumed air of having a definite and immediate engagement somewhere. He acknowledged a roundsman's salute, and at Herald Square quizzed the traffic cop. He seemed also to be an intimate of certain civilians with large feet; men who stood or walked in pairs, with their hands clasped behind them; men who chewed tobacco and expectorated unani-mously and at regular intervals. They did not salute, but merely turned their heads and jerked a mouth corner mysteriously.

"Plain-clothes men," said Dayton, much as he might have said: "On our left is the corner lamp post under which Big Frank Sheldon plugged the fellow who went to a show with his woman."

They edged obliquely into Sixth Avenue at Thirty-third Street. Presently, at Thirtieth Street, Dayton missed his charge. Grell had fallen behind a few paces and was watching another pair of plain-clothes men. The detectives, after a moment's whispering, rapidly crossed the avenue diagonally to the southeast corner where the old Haymarket stood. Dayton, following the direction of Grell's gaze, saw what had also inter-ested the sleuth hounds.

A girl of about twenty-one, brown-haired, more handsome than pretty, and simply dressed, was hold-ing a rather one-sided conversation with a slim, over-dressed man who bore himself with the air of a depart-ment-store floorwalker in momentary distress.

"Come on!" said Dayton. "That's old stuff."

But just then the girl shook a finger in the man's face and stamped a little foot angrily. Instantly the

reporter became alert. Her action was not according to precedent. Possibly she was an irate wife on the trail of an erring spouse; which sometimes provided excellent material for light reading.

The detectives, whom the police reporter identified as Messrs. Bisco and Drane, descended upon the lady. Each seized her by an arm. Bisco, who was fat and had a large wart on the left side of a prehensile nose, addressed a sharp question to the man, who seemed anxious to get away from there.

"Let's look in," said Dayton. As he moved across the street Grell followed eagerly. The detectives grunted recognition of the reporter, but suspiciously eyed Grell. "Friend of mine," said Dayton—and matters proceeded.

"What did this girl say to you?" Bisco asked of the slim, sallow, overdressed person.

"I—I d'no," mumbled the distressed floorwalker, his face white with fear, or possibly the natural alarm of a man who finds himself entangled with the police through no fault of his own. "She talked at such a rate I didn't catch it—something about doing her a favour."

"Ever see her before?" asked Drane, who was tall and wore a miserable, yearning expression, as if he hungered after something and could not be comforted.

"Not me!" said the floorwalker emphatically.

"You know him?" said Bisco, shaking the girl with jerky violence.

"Yes," said the girl; then, "No!—oh, no!"

"So," said Detective Bisco, "you're the sort of girl talks to a gent you never saw before, in the Tender-

loin, past eleven o'clock of a Saturday night—hey? You!" to the man. "Beat it!" And to the girl: "You come on down to the house."

"But—" the girl protested, her eyes filled with horror—"I—I—what have I done? I——"

"You can spiel all that to the sergeant," said Detective Drane. Turning to Bisco he asked: "Ever lamp her before?"

"She's a new one in this precinct," said Bisco.

They marched the girl between them down West Thirtieth Street toward the precinct house. Dayton and Grell followed, the newspaperman silent, indifferent. It was an old story, except that she was a "new one." But his companion's chivalry was up in arms. He had seen a woman—and the word had its own meaning for him—seized by two officers of the law, merely because she spoke to a man on a street corner. And the man? Oren Grell was ready to stake what was left of his two thousand dollars that the man knew the girl and she knew him; that for some reason the girl had chosen to keep silence upon the exact nature of their mutual acquaintance and encounter; that the man had failed her like a coward, saving his own scalp when with a word he could have saved hers. He whispered as much to Dayton. The reporter looked at him amusedly.

"Don Quixote," said he, "in the Tenderloin it's a safe bet to believe all you hear and twice as much as you see."

The group came to the portals of the precinct house. It stood in the middle of the block in a side street.

The House of the Two Green Eyes is always in a side street. Where the lights are fewer and dimmer, in comparative gloom the dull green lamps gleam with a sinister grimness.

The girl, the two plain-clothes men, the reporter and his guest passed between the lamps. The door of the police station shut behind them with its conclusive slam.

Sergeant M'Gonigle was on the desk that night. He did not glance up at the group, even when it came to a standstill before the rail in front of the desk, the reporter and his friend slightly to one side. There was a painful silence accentuated by the ticking of the station-house clock and the scratching of the sergeant's pen as he entered in the blotter minor reports from patrolmen's notebooks. The girl waited, stony cold, the furrows of two recent tears drying upon her smooth but suddenly pallid cheeks. The plain-clothes men waited, and both just missed an admirable, unanimous shot at the cuspidor. In the alcove of the window behind Dayton two other reporters sat, one smoking a pipe, the other rolling a cigarette, both waiting and watching. The station-house cat arched its back and circumnavigated the stove in the rear of the room.

Presently the sergeant mopped the ledger with a blotting pad. Simultaneously, with the other hand he dipped his pen in the inkwell and glanced at the clock. He always did that; so did all sergeants. Then he looked at the plain-clothes men, casually noted that the prisoner was female and grunted:

"Charge?"

"Solicitin'," said Bisco, while Drane got the exact range of the cuspidor.

"It's a mistake!" said the girl dully. The sergeant did not even look at her again. The old clock ticked. Writing in the blotter the sergeant asked mechanically:

"What's your name?"

The girl was silent. He repeated the question—sharply.

"Margaret O'Neill," said the girl brokenly. Then—"No! It isn't. It isn't!"

Bisco and Drane grinned and bombarded the cuspidor. The sergeant looked up with a frown and really observed the girl for the first time. He studied her, casually at first, then with a certain interest. At the same time one of the reporters leaned forward in his chair. He was Jack Hotchkiss, a veteran, sometimes called "Lamps" on account of his bi-focal spectacles, more often "The Sphinx," because he had sat there every night for years, unemotionally studying the waywardness of humanity. The Sphinx seemed to develop a mild interest in the girl.

"Where d'ya live?" asked the sergeant.

"I—I would rather not say," replied the girl who had denied that her name was Margaret O'Neill. The Sphinx leaned a little more forward as the sergeant tried another question.

"What's your business? What d'ya do for a livin'?"

"I—I keep house," faltered the girl.

"In the daytime?" Drane suggested with a grin. Dayton heard a quick intake of breath at his right shoulder. Grell's eyes were upon the tall, cadaverous

plain-clothes man. The newcomer seemed about to open his mouth.

"Quiet, you idiot!" Dayton whispered.

More questions followed, but the girl refused to give an accounting of herself. She refused to repeat what she had said to the man in the street, or to say why she had spoken to him at all, except that she *did* know him, despite her earlier denial. And—"It was a private affair."

The sergeant laid down his pen and studied her keenly. M'Gonigle was a family man himself. He had a daughter of his own about this girl's age. . . . Maybe it was her first offense against the law. Possibly she had had no opportunity to commit the more serious offense against herself. He would have liked to help. But—he had made a sentimental fool of himself before, and once was nearly sent to "pound pavement" in Goatville for trusting a face too readily.

"I'm sorry, little girl," said he, "but I've got to lock you up, unless—Have you got a bondsman?"

"A—a—what did you say, sir?" And when M'Gonigle repeated the question she said: "What's that?" Which remark drove Bisco and Drane to a simultaneous bull's-eye.

She had no "straw bondsman" ready to put up, as security, that side-street barn which did similar service from ten to twenty times of a busy night; no straw bondsman to collect his commission from her once she was back on the pavement. The sergeant pressed a button twice. Twice a bell rang somewhere in the building. A short, stout woman wearing a police matron's uniform and a wooden expression of shift-

eyed face appeared from the rear. Bisco and Drane, with a parting shot at the cuspidor, went out into the night again, satisfied that they had discharged their duty as became servants of the people's law.

The reporters paid no heed to the further proceedings. There was no "story" in it. The matron merely advanced, took the girl by the arm, and drew her toward the door leading to the prison cells. As Margaret started back from the dismal portal, the matron smiled—a mechanical smile of artificial sympathy.

"Come, dearie," she said. "You can tell *me* all about it."

The sergeant, acting upon an impulse, called the matron back.

"Don't lock her up right away, Mrs. Beckwith," whispered M'Gonigle, leaning over the desk. "Talk to her in the back room. See what you can make of her. Get her old man's address and let me know."

The matron nodded and went away with a queer smile. She thought M'Gonigle a fool, but she relished her job. It was her forte. A woman prisoner about whom there was any doubt was her oyster. She would proceed to open it. It might contain a pearl, but she did not expect to find more than an oyster which was not as fresh as it might be. She escorted Margaret to the Matron's Room where many a woman, innocent and otherwise, had suffered physical and mental inquisition. Mrs. Beckwith was adept in administering both.

Dayton, in the meantime, had introduced Oren Grell

to the Sphinx and the other reporter, Deeming of the *Clarion*. The novice at once said hotly:

"Look here! It's an outrage! That girl was as innocent of wrong intent as I am!"

Said Deeming frankly: "With all respect to your record, friend—rats!"

The Sphinx said nothing, but took his spectacles off and wiped them with a none too clean handkerchief. Sir Galahad wished to argue the question, but the sergeant looked up, mopped his blotter, dipped his pen, glanced at the clock, then surveyed the knightly stranger.

"Friend of yours, Dayton?" he inquired mildly.

That was all. Grell subsided. Deeming grinned. The Sphinx adjusted his spectacles to his better liking. Dayton covered his guest's embarrassment by inviting him across the street to meet the bunch, the other Tenderloin newspaper reporters, whose lair was behind a dim-lit door with broken glass panes patched with paper. Across the upper left-hand pane was a cardboard placard with the terse request, hand printed:

DON'T BUTT IN!

Grell, regarding the notice, grinned. Dayton, jerking his head back toward the station house behind the green lights, said:

"That goes, too, as a general rule."

Chapter II

THE SHACK DWELLERS

THE headquarters of the unofficial league known as the Combine was called "The Shack"—two rooms, front and rear, of an old one-story, frame-built cigar store long since abandoned by its owner, who had moved his wooden Indian over to Sixth Avenue. The Shack received no sanction of the great metropolitan journals whose representatives it housed during the eventful hours of Tenderloin night life; but as it stood for coöperation's efficiency its existence and methods were tactfully overlooked.

Thus, "Batty" McHarg, of the *Star*, might be absent from his post for hours, maintaining his batting average, perhaps, or he might take half the night off to finish one of the nickel novels which were a side source of income; Miller of the *Quirinal* might be sitting in at a little four-handed game in the back room of Casey's-on-the-Corner, or Billy Dyer of the *Sphere* be dead-heading a Broadway show—the machine of the shack dwellers ground out the news just the same; all the printable* news of the House of the Two Green Eyes. The only requisite was that each member of the Combine make his "clean-up" in due time for his

* *Printable*—"Anything the Almighty allows to happen is fit to print."—Aphorism attributed to Charles A. Dana of the *Sun*.

paper's first edition. But even when, for instance, McHarg fell by the wayside, or Billy Dyer escorted his girl home and lingered longer, the others who held the fort "covered" him, and no questions were asked at the other end of the telephone wire, which was utilized for late stuff. Early news was written in the shack and sent to main offices by messenger call boy.

All the journals got the same news—precisely the same, and all of it. There was seldom a slip-up by Combine methods. Where one newspaper might excel another in the printed article was merely in the better writing of the story, or in the superior humour of a funny tale, or the greater volume of pathos in a yarn of human interest; for such things are really in the writing. Batty McHarg and Billy Dyer were rivals in this respect. Batty had imagination; Billy had humour; both had a fine touch in sob stuff.

But the Combine of the shack dwellers was kept alert by the existence of two "outs" or "cutthroats." While there was ever a shack dweller on duty in a chair by the sergeant's desk, and ever ready to pass the news across the street, the Sphinx, Jack Hotchkiss, seldom budged from his window corner in the station house. He represented the Central News Syndicate, and the syndicate's excuse for being would have vanished had it supplied to the subscribing dailies only that news which they received through their own men. Now and then, when the Combine's sentry departed momentarily to the shack with a budget of intelligence, the Sphinx, privileged by long intimacy, would have a heart-to-heart talk with the sergeant and presently go to the nearest drug-store telephone. He would return with

a smile and wear the smile all night. The shack dwellers would worry and whisper uneasily, "Lamps has been putting one over!" Sometimes, of course, it was the Combine that wore the smile and Hotchkiss who did the worrying!

The other out or cutthroat was Melville Hooker, of the *Morning Lark*. The *Lark* was the Tenderloin's own organ of the wee, small hours. Did a leading lady elope with her author, or was an opera star robbed of her jewels, Hooker knew about it, and so did the Rialto when the *Lark* came out in the soggiest of the morning hours.

As the outs were ostracized from Combine society, neither the Sphinx nor Stealthy Hooker were in the shack when Dayton brought Grell into its queer company. There were two receding rooms which had once been papered. Now the wall paper hung in patches like battle-torn flags, parched with heat from a tin stove and tanned with tobacco smoke. Through a haze of the latter rough desks were discernible. Miller of the *Quirinal* sat at one, finishing his "copy" to be sent by messenger for the first edition.

"Anything broken loose, Miller?" Dayton asked, tapping the *Quirinal* man on the shoulder.

"Nothin' much since I came on," was the reply. "Before that, about five, there was an auto smash with good names and internal injuries and a Bellevue Hospital end, and——"

"We got that," put in Dayton, "and sent a man from the main office. Lets me out. Anything else?"

"Nothin' the *Sentinel* would use. A nigger cuttin'. Raid on a massage parlour. Low-down badger case.

A couple of houses pulled. Scrap in a hash joint over short change. Really nothin' doin'."

"Thanks, old man," said Dayton.

When Grell, introduced to the bunch, was unanimously elected chairman of the entertainment committee, they put on coats and hats and streamed up the street to Casey's, which was—but is no more—on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street.

Grell was somewhat dazed by the violence of the conversation—and other things. His wonder at the world was not lessened by the scene in the back room of Casey's oasis.

There were four men present, playing poker. One was Mr. Casey, a fat, coarse politician-saloon-keeper with his sleeves rolled back, a huge diamond in his lurid necktie, and a restless, half-eaten cigar in a depressed corner of a wide mouth. A second player was a slim, sallow youth of uncertain age. He had a taking smile, an abnormally bright pair of eyes, and a clever, teasing speech which may have conspired to the stack of chips at his right hand. The other two men were police officers in uniform, slightly *déshabillé*. Their tunics were unbuttoned, their belts and nightsticks laid aside with their helmets, and they smoked cigars and occasionally drank from large beer glasses. The door between the back room and the bar was bolted, as was the side door to the alley before and after the newspapermen entered upon a signal knock. From beyond the inner bolted door came the hum of business in the public bar.

Grell was duly introduced to Policeman Koenig, who was of German parentage, and Policeman O'Halloran,

who was not; also Mr. Casey of the dazzling diamond, and the sallow youth, Stealthy Hooker of the *Lark*. The game presently proceeded after the patrolmen had made inquiries as to the activities of their immediate superior, the roundsman. Hooker dropped out a large winner and set up another round of drinks after Grell had bought.

Presently the unusual entertainment took possession of the Cornell graduate's senses. He found himself actually fascinated by Melville Hooker—Stealthy. At first sight he had disliked the man as somehow unnatural. Stealthy hated the light of day. He seldom saw it, except as the morning after. He looked like a pale worm that has lived long under a rotten board. Yet the man was entertaining. He knew nothing but the Tenderloin, but he knew that from its sewers up. He was the completely evolved Tenderloin rounder, and he was worth more to the *Lark* than the *Lark* was worth to him.

It was Stealthy who after several rounds of drinks offered to assist Dayton in showing Grell around. Grell, who no longer noticed the curious brightness of the Rounder's eyes, was the first to second the motion. There were five in the party which started on the usual Tenderloin tour by the inside route: a tour which begins with the glamour of Broadway and passes through descending stages to a sodden dawn.

The Sphinx, in the meantime, was temporarily the only reporter in the precinct house. Sergeant M'Gonigle, who had been industriously writing up his blotter, glanced at the clock and said to Hotchkiss:

"Jack—what did you think of that little girl Bisco and Drane brought in?"

"She's new," said the Sphinx. "What did Auntie get out of her?"

"Let's see," said the Sergeant, and he rang the matron's bell—two rings.

Margaret, in the meantime, had undergone an ordeal which, at first horrifying, presently lost some of its terrors under the sympathetic manner of Mrs. Beckwith. The matron could be kindly when she wished to be—a studied kindliness.

By such tactics she won, to a certain extent, the confidence of Margaret O'Neill. Mrs. Beckwith had convinced the girl that she had not a doubt of her innocence from the moment she clapped eyes on her sweet face; and that the sergeant had no doubt of it, either. That was why the sergeant had ordered her to be taken to the matron's own room instead of to one of those awful cells.

Still the girl kept her own counsel, although she admitted that her name *was* Margaret O'Neill, and that she *did* know the man to whom she had spoken. She declared, however, that she had never seen him before. She was insistent that she had had no wrong intent in addressing him, but had reasons for keeping to herself the details of a very delicate matter.

"I understand, dearie," said Mrs. Beckwith, slipping an arm about the girl's neck and drawing her to a matronly bosom. "It's a private affair and you can't talk about it to anybody, not even to your father and mother!"

At that the girl burst out sobbing. "Oh, don't let them know! Don't let *them* know!"

"But, dearie!" Mrs. Beckwith protested. "You have no *bondsman*. Your *people* are the only ones can get you out. How will you account for being absent from home *all night*? You can't tell them you've been in a *cell*! And if you're arraigned in Jefferson Market Court in the morning the judge may send you *up*! Then your folks won't know where you've disappeared to. And when you get out they may not want to take you back *home*!"

The matron waited until Margaret's fresh outburst of misery abated, then said:

"Tell you what you *could* do. Let me use the telephone—it would be a *woman's* voice speaking—and tell your *mother*, say, that you are staying downtown to-night with a *girl friend* who is sick."

Margaret slowly lifted her head.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "She would understand that, because—it might be true, and—she'll understand. Oh, yes, do that, please."

The matron rose and went to the door. There she turned and asked casually:

"What was the number, dearie?"

Margaret gave the telephone call, adding: "It's the all-night drug store, Simpkins. He'll send up word. It's just next door, and mother will be sitting up waiting for me—and Dad. He's always late Saturday nights."

Just then the matron's bell rang—twice. When Mrs. Beckwith appeared before M'Gonigle she scribbled on a desk pad, "Simpkins—drug store—

Mother—Mrs. O'Neill—next door," and tossed the slip over the desk to the sergeant.

"You ought to land her folks through that—if you want to," said Mrs. Beckwith sourly. "It's all *I* could squeeze out of the little tart."

"Bet a dollar," said the Sphinx when the sergeant had telephoned, "bet a dollar there'll be a sob story break loose before the platoon goes out."

M'Gonigle glanced at the clock. It lacked a half hour of midnight. The sergeant dipped his pen and resumed his blotter entries.

Chapter III

THE PROBATION LADY

ABOUT an hour after midnight the newspaper bunch entered Henley's restaurant and occupied their accustomed table in a corner far from the orchestra. Henley's was the somewhat flash but solid feeding place where the nighthawks usually ate the midnight meal of their day's high noon.

The place was well filled and would remain so for hours after the law locked the front door and drew the Japanese silk window screens at one o'clock.

As soon as they had patronized the serving bar and taken their places at a table in the outer restaurant, the bright eyes of Hooker glanced about the spacious place. The usual nighthawks were present. There were wine agents, whisky agents, automobile agents, actors, chorus girls, artists, and theatre musicians who rolled agonized eyes to heaven when the orchestra played a popular saccharine ballad (by request) for the third time. In a diagonally opposite corner a justice of the Supreme Court sat with a bottle of square-face gin at his elbow in warm argument with a famous author who listened patiently and sipped black coffee from a demi-tasse.

Grell's eyes suddenly lighted on a handsome man and an attractive woman who occupied a small table

under a potted palm. Grell was somehow interested. They were not man and wife, he felt sure; neither were they lovers. They were altogether too casual in manner toward each other. Here, Grell decided, was a case of the Platonic, a congeniality of intellect or companionship.

The woman's eyes met Grell's as he studied her across the room. Mutual interest held their gaze together for a moment. Then she turned to her companion with polite, recalled attention. She was dark-eyed, dark-haired, with delicately moulded arms and neck. A very beautiful woman; her face suggested strength of character, or wilfulness, which might be evil or good.

Her companion matched her, as opposites sometimes do. He was a big Anglo-Saxon, with a clean, strong face. A slight thinness of the blonder hair at the temples lent him an air of distinction. At a glance he was the sort of man who, if he happened to lack principle, could easily make a fortune. He immediately inspired confidence.

"They make a swell pair," said Stealthy Hooker, noting Grell's interest. "Mighty queer, though. Thick as pigeons an' don't hitch up. An' there could be nothin' else between them, for she's got the good fever. She's high-notch an' does social work—amatoor probation lady to Jefferson Market Court an' rescue-the-perishin' in general. Daughter of old Clavering Kimball, of the frenzied Wall Street crowd, an' they say Clavering don't approve probation work for a cent. The man's Jim Bancroft—J. Loudon Bancroft—the one and only. As a lawyer Jim can shove a leery case

through a needle's eye an' pull himself through after it, if he has to. Once the surrogate came down on him with both feet in a will case. Jim might have been sent up the river, but——"

It was a coincidence that, as Stealthy Hooker was unrolling episodes of Bancroft's tricky legal career to Grell, J. Loudon himself caught Miss Kimball's momentarily distracted attention.

"Who is it now, Frances?" he asked, without turning his head in the direction of her interested gaze.

"Oh, the newspaper boys," she replied. "I know most of them—by sight. I see them in court. A harum-scarum lot, but rather clever and, on the whole, likable."

Bancroft knitted his brows slightly. "I admit their cleverness," said he, "but—there are times when I feel they should either wear a visible license tag or be chloroformed. By the way—speaking of newspaper men—did you ever meet a reporter by the name of Hooker?"

Miss Kimball, who knew Hooker by sight and had observed him talking with the clean-skinned lad who had "college" stamped all over him, was about to suggest that Bancroft turn his head. But all she said for the moment was:

"Why—yes. I know him. That is—as I know most of them. He's a contemptible creature."

"Alas, poor Hooker!" laughed Bancroft. "What's the matter with the man?"

"I can't be sure. In my work I've struck his trail once or twice. I suspect that he accepts money for little services—such as passing the word that the police

commissioner or the district attorney is making a tour of the Red Light district. Then the precinct police are likely to make a number of arrests for appearances' sake. I've heard that this Hooker plays the game at both ends, tipping off the police to This and That, then tipping off That and This to what the police are going to do about it—and at what hour; so that he stands in well on both sides and is a useful go-between in the passing of graft. I know for a fact that he has been a stool pigeon on several occasions, to say nothing of being a tout for gambling houses."

"You talk like a central office bull," said Bancroft. "But what does this fellow look like?—after you've quite finished with him."

"There he is across the room," said Miss Kimball. "At the newspaper men's table—second from this end—side nearest you."

Bancroft had no difficulty in singling out the Rounder. The type Miss Kimball had described was unmistakable. He reminded Bancroft, as he had Grell, of a worm that has lived long away from the light, or some creature which, fearing day, scurries to its retreat at the first twitter of the sparrows in the eaves.

As Bancroft casually studied this product of Tenderloin night life the waiter hurried up to say that the lawyer was wanted on the telephone. Bancroft excused himself and went to a booth, leaving Frances Kimball to resume an interested study of the young man to whom Hooker was discoursing.

Bancroft, in the meantime, picked up the receiver of the booth telephone. He listened intently for a moment, then said quietly:

"Well?"

"Is dis—de boss?" asked a husky, whispering voice.

"You fool!" said the lawyer. "What do you mean by calling me up—here? What do you want, anyway?"

Bancroft listened for a moment. Beads of perspiration slowly formed on his brow, the light from the restaurant and the booth panes glinting on them.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know you. Get out, and stay out!"

He cut off further talk from the other end by hanging up the receiver. Before leaving the booth he wiped his face with a silk handkerchief, then stepped into the private serving bar.

"Give me a stiff hooker, Tom," said he.

"What was that, Mr. Bancroft?" asked the mixer, who was busy.

"A stiff hooker—Scotch!" As Bancroft poured the liquor he laughed drily. "Yes, a hooker."

When he returned to the table in the open restaurant, Frances Kimball said:

"What is your interest in this Hooker person, Jim?"

"Eh?" he ejaculated in a startled way. But when she repeated the question he did not seem to recall Hooker at once.

"Oh, yes—the stool pigeon. He was slightly incidental in a case I had the other day—still have on hand, in fact. I may not want the man, but wished to see him so I'd know him again. Where could I meet him?—casually, you know."

"Hardly here, of course," said Frances. "But tomorrow is Sunday—to-day, in fact," glancing at her

wrist watch. "It is the busy day at Jefferson Market Court after the Tenderloin Saturday night. He'll be there. It's the only time he braves the light of day, I imagine."

"I'll come," said Bancroft, "if you'll be there."

"Must be—by ten o'clock," said she. "It's my busy day, too. For that very reason, Jim, I must be going."

"So many 'musts,'" laughed Bancroft. "But—I'll be there in the morning, too."

As she buttoned her gloves and he placed a handsome cloak about her shoulders, she let her eyes again linger on Grell while Bancroft settled with the waiter. The newspaper men seemed to be having an unusual festival. Deeming of the *Clarion* was having a bibulous argument with Batty McHarg, the nickel novelist. Richard Dayton, before whom stood nothing but a demi-tasse, was leaning across the table and whispering to his guest, who seemed sleepy and a little under the balmy influence of Gilead. Grell appeared to be agreeing to a proposal to adjourn. Frances Kimball somehow felt grateful to Mr. Dayton, whom she knew and liked. She supposed Mr. Dayton's friend was having a night out. But it was a pity, she felt, a great pity.

In the cab, which Bancroft had ordered for the escort home, she was startled from a reverie by Bancroft saying without prelude:

"Frances, why don't you marry me?"

She replied, after a pause, "Why should I?"

He had imbibed a little more than was his custom. He placed a hand upon one of hers.

"It came to me," said he, "while we were sitting at

that table, that if you married anyone else I'd wake to a realization that I'd lost you. Did the same thought ever occur to you—about me?"

"Yes," she frankly replied. "I should miss you."

"Do you care enough, Frances? I think you do. Or does the light that sometimes lies in a woman's eyes lie again?"

She thought. But instinct, dulled or confused by proximity, gave no clear answer.

"My father does not approve, as you know."

Bancroft was silent. She tried to see his face in the quick-shifting light that flashed into the moving cab from the street.

"Why doesn't he like you, Jim? Why are you afraid of him?"

"I'm not afraid of him!" he burst out, as if touched in a tender spot. "Only I'm afraid your father and I are mutually unapproachable and likely to remain so."

The rest of the way they were silent. The subject, marriage, had been dropped. But when the cab drew up before an old-fashioned brownstone house in what was at that time one of the best residential sections and she said, "You had better not get out," he suddenly gathered her in his arms and kissed her. She disengaged herself with an uncertain laugh and said: "Don't be a fool, Jim!"

From the sidewalk, when she had alighted, she said "Good-night!" She appeared quite unruffled by the incident and extended a hand through the open window of the cab.

"Good-night, Frances," said he with a note of amusement. He watched her ascend the steps and

pause at the door as she fumbled in her chatelaine bag for a latchkey.

Then J. Loudon Bancroft ordered the cab driver to take him to his club.

Frances Kimball, the only child of Clavering Kimball, and privileged with a latchkey as a son and heir might have been, was startled presently to find her father standing in the hall of the luxurious home under the light of a Venetian lamp. The latter's diffused radiance revealed a gray head and a face somewhat pallid and drawn with anxiety.

"In the name of all that's reasonable, Frances—where have you been?" he asked with a note of pain, or relief from pain.

"I went to the theatre with a friend and then to supper," she replied, as she calmly replaced the latchkey in her bag without removing her cloak. "What is the matter? Why aren't you asleep? Has anything gone wrong?"

"Anything——?" he began to echo with an odd note. Then, checking himself: "Oh, nothing, nothing," he said. "I keep my little troubles to myself. But I sometimes think, my dear, I am entitled to a little more of your society. Charity begins at home, and God knows I need some of it."

"Is it business?" she asked, with some concern.

"Yes—no. I—— To tell you truth, Frances, I'm a bit lonely. I miss your mother."

The last admission came out with a gulp. Instantly he felt a pair of smooth arms about his neck and warm

lips on his cheek. She was deeply touched by his confession.

"You are like her, yet not a bit like, either, Frances. You live your own life. That's as it should be, of course, and having no sister or brother . . . hardly a home to interest young blood. And then there's your work—so-called. But in the evenings, couldn't you . . . ?"

At the note of grievance the binding spell was broken. Frances took a step backward.

"Father, if you really wish me to, I'll give it up—the work. But, then, what am I to do? I have no sympathy or liking for the things most of my friends do to save themselves from boredom. But I'll give it up."

"No, no!" he protested. "If it pleases you . . . although I can't for the life of me see what good it does; this trying to rescue the perishing. What sort of mind have you, child, that can find interest in hearing the rotten details of every Magdalen who's penitent because she's caught? You can't like it?"

"Like it?" she echoed, momentarily horrified by the suggestion, which was new to her.

"Some women do," said old Clavering bluntly. "I've known 'em. Thinking themselves martyrs of self-sacrifice when it's only a morbid curiosity, a perverse craving for information! You'll generally find such women don't overlook a sex novel once it has been sufficiently roasted by respectable reviewers. It can't be that you *like* it?"

She was very white and made no reply. He thought he had gone too far and hastened to apologize.

"There, there! I'm sure my girl is above that. Maybe you're a bigger character than your dear mother was, or than I can comprehend in my way of thinking. Your mother was not over brainy, thank God! But . . ."

He sighed heavily and turned toward the door of the library. "Well, good-night, Frances."

Left somewhat thoughtful and depressed by the encounter, Frances Kimball slowly ascended the staircase to her rooms. After switching on the lights she paused before a mirror, her evening cloak half thrown back on smooth shoulders.

She studied her reflected beauty in the glass. She looked deep into her own eyes trying to read her own heart. And the question she asked that reflected self was the same her father had raised:

"It can't be that you—*like* it?"

Chapter IV.

"THE CZAR" WALKS ABROAD

FELIX O'NEILL, teamster, lived in the old upper West Thirties, well over toward the river. His dwelling was not a flat, but a frame building with window jalousies that had once been green, a wooden veranda whose paint had faded into an indeterminate drab and was further neutralized by the abortive annual efforts of a stringy, leafless vine.

Felix himself, big-chested, red-faced, with flaming hair, was an epitome of swift passing and progress. Yesterday an immigrant, to-day an American, while he and his wife, Kate, would never quite cease to be "shanty" Irish, the second generation, represented by their daughters, Margaret and Jennie, were flowers sprung of this new soil: pretty, well dressed, not unsophisticated.

Six days a week Felix O'Neill, teamster, bawled, heaved, hauled, lashed, cursed, and argued in that import and export inferno of West Street, and fought his boss's Percherons out of the waterfront maelstrom into less congested thoroughfares. Except on Saturday. Then the latter half of the short day was devoted to the expenditure of a percentage of his wages in less inferior liquor in less inferior environment.

It was between eleven and twelve that Saturday

night when Simpkins, who kept the drug store on the corner of Tenth Avenue, near the O'Neill house, hailed the tacking prow of Felix as, loaded to the gun-wales, the human beer schooner wore ship for the final reach to the home port.

Simpkins, sensing the probable gravity of the message he had for the O'Neill family, went so far as to leave his drug store unguarded for a minute and came into the middle of the street to meet the teamster. He whispered in O'Neill's ear. Felix stared and wiped a hand across his bleared eyes.

"Th' hell ye say!" he muttered incoherently, and again: "Th' hell ye say!"

It lacked but a few minutes of midnight when Felix O'Neill burst into the police station. Miller, the Combine's sentry, had temporarily stepped across the street to the shack telephone. The Sphinx alone represented the great reading public, and Sergeant M'Gonigle the law. In the back room, however, there was a stirring of heavy feet. The midnight platoon was preparing to fall in at the bell summons.

"Where's me darter?" bawled Felix.

Then, abashed by the steady gaze of a fellow countryman in the sober habiliments of the law's majesty framed between torchlike lamps at either end of a magisterial desk, the teamster gulped and stood with his head bowed, two tears rolling down his red cheeks.

"Hold your horses, Pat," said the sergeant quietly. "You're O'Neill—father?"

He pressed a button twice. Mrs. Beckwith appeared.

"Fetch that girl, Margaret," said M'Gonigle. "And

get a move on, Annie," he added, glancing at the clock as the door of the captain's room opened and the "Czar" of the Tenderloin appeared for a moment.

Margaret was brought in. At sight of her father she shrank back; turned to the matron and cried: "Oh!—you told! You cheated me!" The matron smirked.

At sight of his daughter held in that place, on that charge, Celtic rage and Celtic whisky again dominated Felix O'Neill, teamster.

"*You!*" he cried, raising his voice to a bellow. "Howly Mother av God! An' it's meself that brought ye up t' bay a clane, dacent wumman, like yer mother afore ye! An' yer pore mother that worrks hersilf t' th' bone for the likes av a darter that's stravagin' the Tindirloin like a *Jizzibil!*"

"Cut that out!" sharply commanded the sergeant. "If *you* have nothin' better to say for your daughter, the least I can do is to lock her up in a cell. She is charged with soliciting——"

"It's a damn' lie!" yelled Felix. "*My* darter——"

"Cut it!" roared the sergeant. Then, with a hasty glance at the clock, he leaned forward and whispered some paternal or fraternal advice to the teamster. Felix, momentarily sobered by what was said to him, turned to Margaret.

"What hiv ye got t' say for yersilf, girl?" he asked moderately.

"N-nothing," said Margaret. "I didn't do anything wrong, Daddy. It's a mistake."

"A mishtake! A mishtake!" wailed Felix. "Saints presarve us! A *mishtake*, she says! An' did yez make

a mishtake when ye picked up wid a shtrange man in the Tindirloin at ilivin o'clock av a Satterday night? A *mishtake*, she says!"

Felix turned with fight in his eyes. The Sphinx in the corner wiped his glasses thoughtfully. The clock pointed to midnight. From the captain's room the Czar appeared in full uniform.

"Clear the house, Sergeant!" he growled.

The Sphinx arose and went out. The precinct-house jailer, an ex-sailor with a habit of simultaneously hitching his pants and expectorating, had been on the watch for the Czar. The sergeant nodded to him.

"Put that man out, Anthony!"

Anthony did, despite the bulk of his man, for Anthony was practised in the art. There was a brief struggle, bearing toward the street door. Felix had no great objection to going and bore no malice against his ejector. His face and his words were turned upon the sergeant and his daughter. The latter was now being taken by Mrs. Beckwith to a cell.

"That's it—her an' her mother! I'll go home an' bate the truth out av the ould wumman—that I will! As for her, that *Jizzibil!* Lock her up! Send her t' th' reformat'ry! Send her t' Blackwell's Island where she belongs!"

Within the precinct house the platoon had lined up two deep. The relieving sergeant, Remmers, a sour person but a good policeman, sat beside M'Gonigle, who was too kindly to be a good policeman. Captain Murney, Czar of the Tenderloin, stood at the end of the desk and addressed his men.

Murney, who had been raised by some mysterious power from sergeant of an East Side station to the most profitable police captaincy in the metropolis, was resplendent in a new uniform of much blue broadcloth and gold braid. He had had it made three months before when he moved up from the Five Points district to the Great White Way. It was especially designed, when paraded along Broadway at the height of midnight frolic, and when its wearer was flanked by his henchmen, Bisco and Drane, and a sergeant and roundsman, both in uniform, to dazzle evildoers with the Law's, and Captain John Murney's, majesty. During that stately parade through the streets of Gotham, evil turned its face to the wall and grinned, while male escorts, emerging from lobster palaces, paused by the cab step and pointed with pride to this splendid representation of New York's "Finest." Even the old Haymarket's lights seemed momentarily to dim, or wink, in respect to the glittering, passing presence of the Czar of the Tenderloin.

During this promenade the faces of Bisco and Drane were without expression of any sort. They knew all men but saw none in that hour of aloof glory. All men—and many women—knew them, but none risked a flicker of recognition. An hour before, or an hour after, Bisco and Drane might collect tribute from this drug store which sold dope without prescription, or that saloon which kept open twenty-four hours a day, not excluding Sundays, or that painted lady whom they arrested, by agreement, only once a month, or that suave gentleman on the corner who ran a "wheel" or a "bucket shop" in the second story behind him; but

during this hour of tacitly understood truce the Law was the Law and this was its manifestation. In those days even an unworthy corpse was entitled to its little hour of pomp.

But before they went out the Czar addressed his men. From these instructions the public, as represented by the press, was excluded. Yet the public would have been edified. Even the patrolmen, and particularly the henchmen, Bisco and Drane, were impressed by the solemnity of the words that fell from the captain's lips.

After the secret instructions upon tips received from Police Headquarters, from stool pigeons, or from other sources, invariably the Czar came to some such peroration:

"An' now, men, I want t' impress on yer minds that there's an Element in the Tenderloin that's got to be suppressed!

"If on yer beat ye see anything looks like confidence work, or procurin', or peddlin' drugs, or badgerin', or toutin' for gamblin' houses or disorderly places, bring 'em in! That's just the Element we're after!

"I'm determined that, while I'm captain, this precinct is goin' to be cleaned up! I rely on you men to be loyal to *me*. Keep your places. Keep out of saloon back doors. Take no bribes—especially if they are offered. The Element is full of tricks!

"As men in uniform your business is mainly with what you *see* in the open streets. If you *hear* of things goin' on behind closed doors, learn all ye can an' bring the information to *me*. To that Element I will attend myself.

"An' give no information to the press. That's another Element I got to warn ye against. Sometimes it's not advisable for the best ends of the Law to put the newspaper men in possession of the real facts. Sometimes when the real facts is given to the boys they twist 'em around to make a good story. Any information of the inside workings of police administration in this precinct must come from *me*—and me only!

"Now you understand the Element we're after. Very well. The Sergeant will dismiss you to your posts."

The platoon filed out. To his watchful post the Sphinx returned, the temporary embargo against the press being lifted.

Chapter V

SPECIAL EXTRA!

AROUND seven o'clock that Sunday morning Oren Grell found himself stretched on a bench in a Pennsylvania ferryboat at the river end of West Twenty-third Street. Dayton, pale but smiling, was standing over him.

"Going ashore? Or do you need another breezy trip on the river?"

"Thunderation!" muttered Grell, sitting up and rubbing his eyes, "It must have been a night."

"It was," said Dayton, leading the way to the dock.

Grell tried to recall things. His memories were vague; the pictures impressionistic, without focus, veiled in a haze. "Sweet Adeline" . . . many streets with blurring lines of light receding to pin-points . . . strange food in Chinese ware backed by a brutal face somehow connected with a name, "Chuck Connors, Mayor of Chinatown" . . . a persistent clatter and clamour of mechanically reproduced ragtime, sometimes near, sometimes distant, but ever present.

Somewhere along the line the rest of the bunch had disappeared. Dayton would gladly have disappeared, too, after depositing his charge at a hotel—any hotel—bed. But there was never any sleep for him Sun-

day mornings. Once a week, on Sunday morning, he covered Jefferson Market Court, where the garbage of the Tenderloin Saturday night was swept up before a magistrate for disposal.

The coffee restored Grell to some capacity for continued interest in life, although, while completely sobered, his face showed the night's unaccustomed dissipation.

"A pretty boy!" thought Dayton. "But how long, O Lord! How long!"

They entered Jefferson Market Court a few hours later, just as the magistrate took his seat and crisply said to the clerk and the "bridge officer":

"First case!"

The first case was an "intox"—and a married man, too.

"Think shame of yourself!" said Magistrate Marlowe. "Go home and explain it to your wife. I'll let her do the sentencing. Next case!"

And so the law passed along and upon the mixed line of drunks, drug addicts, painted ladies, petty thieves, and disorderlies. Comedy and tragedy walking hand in hand.

Before the magistrate's bench there was a railed-in space for the accommodation of prisoners in line, lawyers in attendance, reporters, court officers, complainant policeman, and probation officers. Back of that rail sat the public, represented by relatives, or friends, of prisoners, and the inevitable sensation seekers.

Within the railed area shysters, policemen, reporters, and everybody else, even the prisoners, min-

gled with a disregard for courtroom etiquette that was astonishing. In a corner might be a reporter shooting craps with a uniformed policeman, who merely compromised by keeping his broad back toward the bench. There another reporter might be sprawling over the magisterial desk, telling the latest *risqué* story to the clerk of the court. Down on the prisoners' line a couple of shyster lawyers might be drumming up business, offering to see an offender through for half the price of the probable fine, anything from two to ten dollars.

The court was, and sounded like, some sort of fair, or a curb market where liberty was the commodity whose price was juggled. The magistrates were more or less honest, save that an Irish judge was lenient to an accent accompanying a long upper lip, a Tammany judge was susceptible to a hint in time, and other magistrates had individual idiosyncrasies—such as Corning, who hated the press, Marlowe, who hated the police, and Toole who was hipped on fine points of law and had a special affection for “city ordinances.”

It was a scene for Hogarth. It was like a play in the Elizabethan days when the actors could hardly move on the stage for the projecting feet of the audience.

Among those within the rail of privilege was Miss Frances Kimball; also Mr. Oren Grell of Rochester, the guest of Mr. Richard Dayton of the *Sentinel*. Mr. Melville Hooker of the *Lark* was also among those present. In the prisoners' line, not so privileged, was Miss Margaret O'Neill, sandwiched between a painted lady who called her “dearie” and a twitching male who

was presently to be sent to Ward 32, Bellevue Hospital, for the treatment covering zoological hallucinations.

In the audience, outside the rail, sat a worn woman with a shawl gripped about her throat and her eyes fixed upon a girl who was on the other side of the rail. Shysters might speak to Margaret O'Neill, or probation officers pry with the probe of inquisitorial charity; painted ladies might address her as one of the sisterhood, or reporters ask pointed questions concerning her antecedents and present predicament; but Margaret's mother must content herself with looking at her daughter, speaking with eyes in the mute language of mingled doubt and faith.

Margaret saw her, looked at her only once, and could not bear to look again. Eyes could not tell the secret which, while her lips had refused to divulge it to others, her heart longed to unburden to her mother.

Dayton had been watching the girl for a few minutes; he hardly knew why. He had not so studied her at the precinct house. He had drawn no conclusions other than that she was probably what her presence in that offenders' line implied. Yet the discerning eye of the reporter now read something in the anguish of that mother's face and the dry-eyed distress of the girl's so in contrast with the calculating businesslike air of the professional sinner ahead of her. Principally Dayton was interested in the way the girl winced before the occasional confidential sisterly addresses of the painted lady.

Dayton had just introduced Oren Grell to Miss Kimball, the probation lady. As these two seemed

immediately to find something of vast interest in each other, perhaps a common isle of social safety amid that black surge, the reporter left them together and approached Margaret O'Neill. He said quietly:

"You don't belong here. Don't want to butt in, of course, but can't I help somehow? Got any friends?"

"No," she said quietly, as if dismissing him and further advances.

"That your mother out there with the shawl?" he persisted.

The girl's lips quivered.

"Y-yes."

"All right. Want to send her a message? Leave it to me."

"Oh!" Margaret breathed, almost gasped. "Oh, I do, but——"

For a few moments her gaze and Dayton's met and held together. In his gray eyes she saw much worldly wisdom but also human charity. In hers he saw blue pools fringed with long dark-brown lashes. On the instant he thought of Irish wishing wells with drooping ferns about them.

"Good Lord!" he whispered to her. "I've got to get you out of this! But what can I do? Can't you tell me about it?"

"Oh I can't tell anybody," she said in despair and hurry. "That's the worst of it. It's only—poor mother. She doesn't understand—how it came about, I mean. If you could——"

"I'll do anything. What's the message?"

"Tell her," said Margaret, after a moment's hard thinking. "Tell her, I meant no wrong, nor did any.

She was right. Tell her that. It was dangerous. Tell her it was the thing she and I talked about, and it was *him*. That's all, Mister——" He quickly supplied his surname. "She'll know what I mean."

"O. K.," said Dayton cheerily. "What's *your* name? Margaret? Right-O! I'll bring back her answer."

He passed through the gate in the centre of the rail, the guardian officer standing back with a nod of recognition. He went to where Kate O'Neill sat crumpled up in a public seat and whispered the cryptic message as it had been given him, beginning with "Margaret says to tell you——"

For a moment the mother stared up at him stupidly; then her eyes wandered to the figure of the girl in the prisoners' line. So did Dayton's gaze. Margaret's face was proud.

Dayton turned to look at the mother. Kate's eyes shone with great relief.

"Oh, the great heart of her!" he heard her whisper in soft Irish brogue. "Oh, the great heart of her!"

"Any message back?" Dayton asked crisply.

"God bless her! God bless her!" muttered Kate O'Neill, seeming not to have heard him.

He went back through the rail gate and to the girl's side.

"What did she say?" she whispered.

"Just that you have a great heart, and God bless you," Dayton paraphrased.

"Oh!" the girl breathed happily. "Then it's all right. Now I don't care what happens."

"Nothing's going to happen," said Dayton, scrib-

bling with his pencil on a scrap of copy paper. "You're going home with your mother, and, say, little girl, do me a favour."

"Yes?"

"Keep out of the Tenderloin."

"Oh!" This time the gasp was of pain. Did *he* think . . . ? But he had turned away and was walking toward the "bridge," the platform before the magistrate's desk. He had torn the scrap of writing from his copy paper, squeezed it into a little ball, and now, leaning across the magisterial bench, he dropped it casually near His Honour's hand.

The magistrate unravelled the paper ball and read the writing, heedless the while of the laboured explanation of a male "intox" who was attributing his fall from grace, not to liquor, but to the fact that he took a drink early in the day in the hope of alleviating an acute attack of indigestion.

"Dis-charged!" said Magistrate Marlowe, not looking at the prisoner, but with a faintest nod to Dayton. "Next case!"

Margaret's arraignment was still a few turns off when down the aisle between the public seats walked a large, blond man. He had a commanding presence heightened by a frock coat and a tall hat. He carried the hat, with gloves and a cane, in his left hand. It was J. Loudon Bancroft.

Stealthy Hooker was on the bridge at the moment, listening to some details of a case spicy enough for the *Lark*, when his eyes lighted on the newcomer. The Rounder nudged the *Sentinel* man.

"What's the one and only J. Loudon doing here?" he whispered. "Let's get busy."

"Mmm!" Dayton hummed, his own curiosity aroused. "Don't pay any attention. But keep your eye on him. He'll maybe show us in a minute."

J. Loudon Bancroft was allowed through the gate. The lawyer went straight to Miss Kimball where she stood to one side in lively conversation with Oren Grell. The young man seemed to have recovered astonishingly from the night's carousal. But depression weighed on him again as he found himself quickly shouldered out of Miss Kimball's exclusive interest by the presence and stronger personality of Mr. Bancroft. Presently Grell drifted away from the pair and joined Dayton on the bridge.

"And now, my dear," said Bancroft in his dominating but pleasant way. "This Hooker person you pointed out last night at Henley's. Is he here? Suppose you point him out again. I want to be sure of him in connection with a small matter I have in hand."

When it came Margaret's turn to stand before the magisterial bar, Messrs. Bisco and Drane, the arresting officers, lined up on either side of her, each adroitly adjusting his quid in that cheek pouch which nature may have designed for the purpose.

"State your case, officers," said Magistrate Marlowe rather wearily. He was toying with a little paper ball as one might with a breadcrumb.

Bisco and Drane, confident that they had a strong case, told the incident of Margaret accosting a stranger in the Tenderloin late on Saturday night. The

stranger had admitted to Detective Drane, and Detective Bisco corroborated, that he had had no previous acquaintance with the woman.

Magistrate Marlowe looked a little worried. He glanced dubiously in Dayton's direction. At the same time Stealthy Hooker was gazing curiously at Margaret O'Neill. The Rounder had a feeling that he had seen her before—somewhere in his midnight Tenderloin.

"Did you know the man you spoke to, defendant? Had you seen him before?" Marlowe asked of the girl.

"Yes—no," she answered. "I had never met him before. But I knew him and was there to meet him."

"Huh!" grunted Marlowe. The flame of his personal antagonism leaped against the police. "Strange that a woman cannot keep an appointment without being arrested as an immoral woman!"

Detective Bisco smiled wisely. Drane opened his mouth to say that it took two to arrange a legitimate meeting. But His Honour was again addressing Margaret.

"My dear," said he in a kindly way, "do you wish, so as to clear up this matter at once, to tell the Court what you were doing in the Tenderloin at that hour? Why you chose for a rendezvous a corner near a resort so notorious as the Haymarket?"

"I—I can't explain, sir," said Margaret desperately. "I—I can't! But, please believe me, I had no wrong intention. It was a matter of a private nature. I didn't know it was a bad place, or near a bad place."

"I believe you absolutely!" said the magistrate, at

the same time glaring at Bisco and Drane. "It is not the first time a quite respectable woman has been arrested merely for being in a street where she has a perfect legal right to be and in the company of any man she pleases to meet there. Of course, my dear," he added paternally to Margaret, "if ever I saw you brought before me again on a similar charge, I should be compelled, perhaps, to revise my estimate of your character. Therefore, in discharging you, let me advise you to keep out of the Tenderloin as a matter of policy. Once arrested may be the result of error; twice begins to be a habit. And as the police are not likely to make you an apology, permit me to offer one on behalf of our fair city.

"Discharged!" he snapped, with a vindictive glare at Bisco and Drane and the faintest glance in Dayton's direction. "Next case!"

As the next case was pushed up from the line Magistrate Marlowe caught the eye of Frances Kimball and nodded after the figure of the retreating girl, Margaret, who was passing through the gate with the reporter, Dayton. Miss Kimball, catching His Honour's hint, detached herself from J. Loudon Bancroft and followed the *Sentinel* man and Margaret, who were immediately joined by the tearfully happy Kate O'Neill. Oren Grell also trailed out to the corridor.

Bancroft, left alone, devoted all his attention to Melville Hooker, only to discover presently that the Rounder was studying him! Then these two moved toward each other as if by magnetic attraction.

Neither Margaret nor her mother were content to

exchange greetings in the corridor. Shedding the atmosphere of the place, they went out to the sidewalk of Sixth Avenue and there formed a group with Dayton, Grell, and Miss Kimball.

Margaret, her eyes swimming with tears, held out an impulsive hand to the newspaperman.

"Oh, how can I ever thank *you*!"

"I told you how," said Dayton, smiling into her wrought face. "Keep away from this mudhole. Even angels are liable to get spattered."

The mother was speechless. She could only gulp and nod to Dayton, holding his other hand, much to the reporter's embarrassment. Grell glanced at Frances Kimball and smiled.

"Saint George!" he chuckled.

"Now it's my turn," said the probation lady laughingly, stepping forward and taking Margaret's hands in hers.

"I'm Frances Kimball," said the daughter of old Clavering, "and I want to come and see you. I'll be frank and say that I'm what they call a 'probation lady.' I wouldn't have any right to follow up in your case, but I do want to know you better. Won't you invite me to come and see you? Please tell me where you live."

For an instant Margaret's eyes and her mother's met in a swift exchange. It was plain that Margaret feared to grant the simple favour.

"It's all right," Dayton said. "I'm sure you can trust Miss Kimball."

"Perhaps you'll let me come with Miss Kimball and see fair play," put in Grell. "She might be a dragon

disguised as a fairy, you know. You never can tell."

Frances Kimball laughed at the audacity of this, her latest and swiftest of admirers. Dayton chuckled. Margaret smiled happily and gave Grell a disengaged hand (Miss Kimball was holding the other). The girl was in a whirl. They were none of them strangers to her in that hour. She consented and gave Frances Kimball the address.

Bisco and Drane, looking on glumly from the court entrance, simultaneously bull's-eyed a crack in the third step of the descent to the sidewalk.

"There's justice for yuh!" growled Bisco.

"An' the mayor blames open vice on the po-leece!" snarled Drane.

There was silence between the two while Bisco bit off a fresh chew from his plug. Then Drane muttered:

"'Twould ha' paid us better to 'a' shook her down for ten on the street an' let it go at that."

"Well, there's always the next time," said Bisco. "How about a little snifter over at Kelly's place?"

Bancroft, who had come to Jefferson Market Court to look over Melville Hooker, but with no intention of speaking to him, was a bit taken aback to observe the Rounder coming toward him with personal business evident in his approach.

The lawyer was secretly relieved to discover that Stealthy merely wished to know if there might be any news behind this visit to a common police court.

"None at all. None at all!" said Bancroft pleasantly. "Merely wanted a word with Magistrate Marlowe, a little club committee matter."

"Oh? 'S that all?" said the Rounder, apparently doubtful of the truth of the explanation. "Thought maybe it was Miss Kimball, knowing you and she are acquainted."

"Who? Miss Who? What *are* you talking about?"

Hooker looked J. Loudon Bancroft square in the eye. "Mean to say," he said, "you don't know the lady you were talking to three minutes ago?"

"'Pon my word!" exclaimed Bancroft, quite interested. "Was that Miss Kimball?—daughter of Clavering Kimball?—the lady I asked about when court was likely to adjourn? Wish I'd known. Seemed charming."

It was on the tip of the Rounder's tongue to ask if it had not been this same lady with whom Bancroft had had supper at Henley's on the previous evening. But he let the matter pass for the moment, heaping coals of fire by saying:

"Come on out into the corridor and meet the dame. She's all you say about her—one swell piece of millinery!"

Bancroft's face flushed with anger, but he could think of no excuse for declining to meet the lady, or thought it wiser to carry his bluff through. He followed the Rounder through the gate in the rail. Hooker seemed to know that the club committee matter could wait. The lawyer was oddly flustered.

Outside, they came upon the group composed of Margaret and her mother, Grell, Dayton, and Frances Kimball. To the last-mentioned, with whom the *Lark* man had the common court privilege of acquaintance

and freedom of address, Stealthy said in his best manner:

"Miss Kimball. Shake hands with Mr. J. Loudon Bancroft, the well-known attorney."

For a second or two Miss Kimball was petrified with astonishment, while the *Lark* reporter's unnaturally bright eyes flickered from her face to Bancroft's. The Rounder was enjoying himself.

"I think," said the lawyer quickly, "I think I had the pleasure of a rather casual meeting in court there. Perhaps if we overlook this further informality . . . ?"

"Oh, it's all in the day's work," said Frances, laughing nervously and turning again to Margaret O'Neill.

For a few moments Bancroft found himself with Hooker and Grell. Both made him uncomfortable. Hooker was acting queerly, or so Bancroft's wariness whispered. Grell clearly liked Miss Kimball and did not like Mr. Bancroft. Besides, this other young man must know of his own previous acquaintance with Miss Kimball. Grell must have heard the lawyer address her as "Frances" back there in court.

Dayton had momentarily stepped aside to purchase from a newsboy a special extra of the *Evening* (Sunday) *Dispatch*, the only afternoon newspaper issued on Manhattan's "day of rest." Now the *Sentinel* man rejoined the group, advancing slowly with the pink sheet spread under his eyes and his brows drawn together thoughtfully.

"Mr. Bancroft," said he quietly, "your coming down to Jefferson Market Court this morning couldn't have to do with the Villiers case, could it?"

Although the lawyer had been schooled against be-

traying surprise of any sort, the quietness of the question and the questioner disconcerted him momentarily. He started.

"The Villiers case? What do you mean?"

"Why," drawled Dayton, "Mrs. Villiers, that rich old eccentric we've had so many Sunday stories about, was found dead early this morning on a bench in Washington Square Park. Foul play is suspected, but none of the jewels she was in the habit of wearing had been taken from her body."

For a few seconds there was silence, broken only by the soft exchanges of Margaret and Frances Kimball, the oncoming rumble of an elevated train, and the sudden remark of the Rounder:

"*Some—story!*"

"My God!" gasped Bancroft at last. "Mrs. Villiers! It can't be *the* Mrs. Villiers? Why, she's my client!"

"Sure!" said Dayton. "That's why I mentioned it. Thought, perhaps, you were here on some end of the business. They must be telephoning all over to find you."

"As you say, they must!" said Bancroft, apparently dazed. "Good God! Mrs. Villiers!"

And with that he turned abruptly and rushed toward the staircase of the elevated railway station a block away.

Dayton, with little more than the ceremony of waving a farewell to Margaret, and completely forgetting Grell, crammed the pink extra into a pocket and took a flying leap aboard a northbound Sixth Avenue car. Margaret and her mother, sensing a strangeness now

that their champion had gone, shyly bade the others good-bye and walked slowly away.

Grell turned to Frances Kimball with a smile of satisfaction.

"I'm afraid this excitement is too much for my up-state nerves," said he humorously. "Dayton has deserted me and I'm alone in New York. Won't you take me up, on probation?"

He was looking into the dark eyes of Frances Kimball as he spoke. There was a haze of trouble there, but at the frankness of his plea the haze vanished and a soft light succeeded.

She wondered at herself. But they had progressed very rapidly, these two, and she had by her non-protest agreed to the proposition that he escort her when she went to visit Margaret O'Neill. If they were to see more of each other it could hardly be amiss to begin now.

"Perhaps," she said, "when court adjourns at noon——"

"A little luncheon," he suggested, "and then just to sit in one of the parks and talk—or get murdered!"

She laughed. "But I must go back in now," she said, turning toward the court entrance. Grell, smiling, went with her.

Stealthy Hooker looked after them, then toward the "el" station which had received J. Loudon Bancroft. He pursed his lips and soundlessly breathed the opening bars of the national air:

"*O-oh, say—can—you—see-e-ee . . . ?*"

Yet he was wondering again where he had seen that girl Margaret O'Neill before. Her face had been

familiar. He was sure, however, that the occasion, and the girl, were unimportant to him. Probably one of the many moths that flitted in and out of his Tenderloin's midnight flare—moths that were myriad enough to have no distinctive markings even in the "Who's Who" of his peculiar pigeonhole brain.

Chapter VI

THE VILLIERS CASE

WHILE the mutual attraction of Oren Grell and Frances Kimball progressed, Richard Dayton reached the *Sentinel* office, arriving before the usual hour at which morning newspaper reporters are wont to appear. The fatness of his weekly pay envelope, over and above his regular Tenderloin salary, depended upon the amount of column space his outside gleanings occupied. Dayton was keen to grab the fat assignment which had developed in the Villiers case.

He got it, not only because he was earliest at the office, but because he was a highly capable young man. And the assignment was, as Dayton joyously reflected and Hooker had estimated, "*some—story!*"

This Mrs. Villiers, who had been found dead on a park bench in Washington Square under circumstances suggesting an unnatural end, was an eccentric old lady whose early past was shrouded in much that was bizarre.

In her heyday she was said to have had many adventures, matrimonial and, the unkindly said, otherwise. But just who *Mr.* Villiers was, or had been, was never quite clear. She had borne different names at different periods; so that Villiers might have been but a convenient adoption.

There could be no doubt that she was quite rich. None could say how rich or whence the riches. The fact remained that, if extravagance in the indulgence of personal whim is any criterion, she had, almost literally, money to burn: that is, to consume for the sheer delight of consuming it—a sort of financial pyromania.

Magazine sections of Sunday newspapers had carried so many pictured stories of this eccentric lady that the subject could stand no further treatment. She had to be murdered to get into the limelight again. So that Richard Dayton, who was a reporter with an eye to space, though a more or less Christian gentleman otherwise, fervently hoped that the old lady *had* been murdered. So long as the old lady was dead, it could hardly make much difference to the old lady.

Briefly to condense many illustrated pages of past Sunday-magazine-section history:

Mrs. Villiers, as "Belle" Tremaine (supposedly her maiden name), had once been very beautiful. Some elderly men, still sighing, recalled her as a kind of Pompadour, or Du Barry, in love affairs with celebrated persons who were well enough known to have known better, and in political affairs (particularly of the once-notorious Tweed Ring) a reincarnated Madame Roland. It was said that in moments of great harrassment even the great Boss of earlier days himself sought out Belle Tremaine and hearkened to the voice of her intuition. No doubt, between Tammany and the slightly referred to affairs matrimonial

and otherwise she acquired the foundation of that fortune which she was said to have possessed.

A good deal was known of her one-time hectic career behind the political scenes of Washington and New York. Less was known of her love affairs, for the self-explaining reason that the more open ones were conducted in Paris and, if she had any at all in the land of her nativity, respect for public opinion or her own interests shrouded them behind a discreet veil.

For many years she had been so lost to sight and memory that her most devoted admirers of earlier days came to agree that she must be dead. Then she reappeared, as Mrs. Villiers, a woman in her sixties, who opened a queenly, and as royally exclusive, salon in an old mansion in Washington Square.

Here this woman held a court at which none of her old admirers, now more or less senile, were in the least welcome. For this old lady, whose spirit time could not wither, whose beauty cosmetics served to embalm, refused to admit the passage of years. She dyed her hair a rich russet golden, filled in the facial ravages of time with grease paint or enamel, kept a natural set of glorious teeth to the end, dressed like a woman of thirty—in a somewhat Colonial style in public, with a dash of Louis Seize in private—and always wore a prodigious quantity of remarkable jewels.

She worshipped Youth and would have nothing but Youth in her train. Masculine Youth, that is; for she feared the comparison of girlish beauty. As a result, her *levées* were overrun with that type of effeminate male which hangs around silly old womanhood and

fattens on the profits naturally accruing from intensive flattery.

Once a week she held court, sitting on a kind of throne to receive the compliments of her courtiers. On these occasions she dressed like a stage queen and permitted each flatterer to kiss her fingertips after he had paid his compliment and before he gave place to the next in line. And when a courtier pleased her vanity with some more than ordinarily well-turned compliment to her physical charm and mental equipment she had a pleasant little habit of detaching and presenting a diamond brooch or a jewelled ring. On these little gifts a courtier might thrive for three or four months, just as courtiers or soldiers of fortune did in other days when even a manly person like D'Artagnan scorned not to accept and spend a lady's gift of pistoles.

It was all so truly romantic, the atmosphere of this queen and her little court, that the New York outside the mansion's walls could only marvel at such a survival (if the Sunday papers told even a grain of the truth) and perhaps envy that Youth which was privileged to kneel and kiss the painted old lady's generous fingertips.

And J. Loudon Bancroft was, in these latter days, her man of affairs.

Not that J. Loudon Bancroft approved his client's behaviour, or the manner in which it pleased her to consume her fortune. But it was none of his business. His bills, freely rendered, were generously paid. It is a question whether her highness even condescended to glance over the mercenary items.

To the great satisfaction of Mr. Richard Dayton and reporters of rival sheets, it speedily developed that Mrs. Villiers, née Tremaine, had been murdered. At first murder had been merely suspected as there were no definite marks of violence on her body. And, mainly, there was no apparent motive for murder. Her neck, bosom, wrists, and fingers blazed with splendid, if old-fashioned, jewellery. It was the gleam of this that had attracted a policeman to the spot in the park where her body remained propped in a seated attitude against a bench back.

Bancroft, discovering that the remains had been removed to the Morgue, after he had identified his late client, at once obtained permission from the coroner to have Mrs. Villiers's body taken to a private undertaking establishment in West ———th Street. There the coroner's physician, Dr. O'Hara, performed a swift autopsy.

Mr. Wycliffe, the fashionable undertaker, who had an advertiser's respect for free publicity, brought the first news to the waiting reporters that the autopsy upon the body of Mrs. Villiers, "conducted by Coroner's Physician O'Hara in the private mortuary of the Wycliffe Funeral Undertaking Corporation," had revealed death by strangulation. Upon closer examination faint marks *had* been found about the throat. They might not have been finger marks, but, taken in conjunction with the condition of the lung-cells, they undoubtedly were.

The coroner's physician, emerging presently with his little black bag, confirmed all this, while Mr. Wycliffe looked significantly at the reporters as if to say,

"There! I told you so. Don't forget—'according to the managing director of the Wycliffe Funeral Undertaking Corporation.' "

After the physician's declaration, which provided the newspapers officially with a full-fledged murder mystery, there was a scurry among the reporters to find J. Loudon Bancroft, the late Mrs. Villiers's man of affairs. Since it was Sunday and Bancroft's offices were closed, the press men encamped opposite the lawyer's apartments in West Fifty-sixth Street. After some hours, Bancroft, looking haggard and anxious, appeared there and was immediately bombarded with questions. To obviate arrest for obstructing the sidewalk he invited the reporters to his rooms and there capitulated to superior numbers.

He had heard what the autopsy revealed? Yes. Then who murdered Mrs. Villiers? And why?

The lawyer confessed to complete mystification. He had no clue. Neither had the police, so far as he knew. He could think of no motive, except robbery, which would go far to explain why a harmless old lady had been done to death. But she had not been robbed of the thousands of dollars' worth of jewels on her person. At the same time there was nothing to indicate that anything had occurred to frighten robbers off before they could have secured the jewels.

No. The motive was apparently not robbery. What then? Had she enemies? None that J. Loudon Bancroft could think of at the moment. Any person or persons who might greatly benefit by her death?

"As to that—of course," said Bancroft wearily. "She left a perfectly ordered will, but the person

named as beneficiary would have inherited under any circumstances. Unless, of course," the lawyer added with a humouring laugh, "unless he was becoming impatient for the old lady's demise and assisted her off the stage."

Who was this beneficiary? the reporters asked with a closing-in movement of tense interest.

"Gentlemen," said Bancroft, with grave deliberateness, "Mrs. Villiers died worth in the neighbourhood of one million dollars in real estate, bonds, jewels, and other personal property. The entire estate is willed—and has been for many years—to her son, Henry Villiers."

Who—where—was Henry Villiers? Or, as the *Quirinal* reporter put the question: "What kinda guy's this Henry, an' where does he hang out?"

"Henry Villiers," Bancroft elucidated with an obvious attempt at patience, "was a son by her one and only marriage. He left home when he was fifteen—ran away, I believe, and went West. But no doubt he will turn up quickly enough when he hears he is heir to a million-dollar estate."

"How'd the old dame get all that coosh?" inquired the indefatigable young man from the *Quirinal*.

"Mrs. Villiers was a shrewd woman in business affairs," said Bancroft, coldly eyeing the inquisitor, who suddenly decided to let some other reporter take the floor.

"Was there a falling-out between mother and son before the latter ran away?" asked Dayton.

"Meaning," Bancroft half sneered, "did the son hate the mother enough to accelerate her exit?"

"As you please," said Dayton quietly.

"Probably not," said the lawyer, more civilly, perhaps realizing that there are reporters and reporters. "Probably the son will hardly recall that he ever had a mother until he reads the newspapers."

"How can you be sure he'll see the newspaper stories of the case?"

"We'll chance that," said Bancroft. "Also, I plan an advertisement in to-morrow's issues. You might all jot it down now. It should have some news value, although I want it also in the regular advertising column—under 'Personal.' "

The lawyer thought for a moment, then dictated to the reporters:

If this should meet the eye of Henry Villiers, son of Mrs. Belle Villiers, who was murdered in Washington Square Park, New York, he will benefit largely by communicating at once with the undersigned attorney, J. LOUDON BANCROFT, Broadway, New York City.

"You haven't got a picture of this son and heir?" a *Star* man asked.

"I was just thinking about that as a means toward finding Henry Villiers," said Bancroft. "Unfortunately, there is no recent picture of him. He may be dead, for all that is known to the contrary. But——"

Bancroft drew from an inside pocket of his frock coat a three-by-five-inch photo mounted on pasteboard. It was of a sallow youth with a weak chin and rather large, soft eyes. The sallowness was accentuated by perhaps ten years' ageing of the print.

"That's Henry Villiers at fifteen," said Bancroft,

turning the face of the picture to the group of reporters.

A dozen hands reached to capture the prize, but Bancroft drew the picture back.

"No, no, gentlemen! I can't let this thing out of my possession. But if one of you enterprising camera men can make a copy, here and now——"

"A cinch! Sure!" chorused the camera men present.

Presently, Bancroft yielding no more to questioning, the photograph was set up and by general consent copied by Tom Collins, of the *Sphere*, "dean" of the newspaper photographers. Thereafter he, with the other camera men, adjourned to Park Row to develop the negative and make prints for distribution among those in on the story. The scribes, comparing notes after Bancroft refused to be interviewed further until noon on the following day at his office, separated to their respective shops. There they went to work on the story, each according to his conception of Fact.

This was as far as the Villiers case progressed that day. Dayton, having lost sleep on the previous night, went to bed early, having in the meantime completely forgotten the existence of Oren Grell, of Rochester, who was building castles of romance with Frances Kimball.

Next morning the world had the satisfaction of devouring many columns concerning the murder of Mrs. Belle Villiers; also a great deal of back history which, in the sombre light of tragedy, was spicier reading than ever. Furthermore, millions of eyes gazed with mingled feelings and varying degrees of interest

upon rather vague or strongly retouched reproductions of the face of "Henry Villiers, at 15—Missing Heir to \$1,000,000!"

But only six persons saw the picture with more than passing or slightly envious interest.

One was Stealthy Hooker. He paused over the makings of a cigarette, closed one eye, and addressed the printed face, saying:

"*Wie gaetz*, old top! Where have I seen *your* phiz before?"

Detectives Bisco and Drane looked at one another after studying the picture in amazed silence. Then said Drane:

"It's *him*, all right, the guy that little tart talked to Saturday night in front of the Haymarket."

When Margaret O'Neill, at home, saw the picture she was momentarily staggered. She summoned her mother and said in a faint, sick voice:

"Look, Mother. Oh, look! It's—it's the *man*."

Mrs. O'Neill took the newspaper in her worn hands and stared at the sallow, characterless face. Then her lips tightened. She rose from the chair into which she had sunk. She crushed the sheet in her hands, took the lid off the stove, and crammed the whole newspaper into the hot fire.

The sixth person intensely interested in that picture was H. Augustus Smythe, floorwalker.

Chapter VII

THE GENTLE "TOUCH"

DAYTON and Stealthy Hooker were among the first of the morning-newspaper men to appear at Bancroft's office about noon Monday. The office was in a downtown building near Park Row. The hall of the third floor was already crowded with afternoon newspaper men and a fair sprinkling of flash photographers.

The afternoon boys, at no expense to themselves, gave the newcomers a résumé of the morning's happenings. The advertisement calling for the missing heir must have attracted the attention of a large number of persons. Since 10 A. M. there had been a continuous dropping in of claimants. Most of these were impostors, or they had some vague idea that they *might* be Henry Villiers, having perhaps but a vague idea of their real parentage. Most of them supported their imposture, or delusion, with a more or less close resemblance to the printed photograph of Henry Villiers. Differences in nearly every case might well be accounted for by the lapse of ten years since that picture was made.

With few exceptions the claimants were treated to short shrift by Bancroft. They looked less hopeful than scared when they left the lawyer's office. For J. Loudon had succinctly pointed out to them that,

whether real or impostor, the accepted man might find himself under the necessity of establishing an iron-clad alibi in the matter of Mrs. Villiers's murder.

"The heir," said Mr. Bancroft pointedly, although he did not believe what he insinuated, "is the only person who might have had a motive for assisting the old lady's premature removal."

Much of this the reporters did not learn until later in the day, because Bancroft pleaded the rush of claimants to postpone the arranged noon interview until late in the afternoon. So that the press camp in the hall was compelled to wait. The wait was enlivened by a small crap game on the marble floor tiles between squad trips to a corner bar. But always there was a special detachment of three or four reporters and photographers on alert duty near Bancroft's door.

The story was momentarily being covered by Combine methods, into which Stealthy Hooker never entered. As something of a press pirate he was outside the pale of respectable journalistic circles. His presence and the newspaper he represented were merely tolerated because there was no law to remove or suppress either.

And because he worked alone, and in ways that were dark, he occasionally "scooped" the regulars even in legitimate news; for besides possessing a most unholy knowledge of the seamy side of things and a personality which was winning to the underworld "Element," Melville Hooker was gifted with an almost diabolical intuition, what is called "news sense," for happenings, possibilities and probabilities of happenings.

When another sallow, slim young man of about twenty-five or -six came quietly from Bancroft's office and was allowed to pass the watch with only a few questions—to which the sallow one replied with a frightened incoherence—Stealthy Hooker, suddenly developing a hunch, strengthened by a remarkable memory for faces, ran down three flights of stairs while the quarry he had marked waited for the elevator.

The Rounder was in the ground-floor hall when the sallow one emerged from the descended cage. Hooker casually followed him out to the Broadway pavement. Here, as the 'steenth claimant stood staring blankly at the passing traffic, Stealthy tapped him on the shoulder and said cheerily:

"Hallo, Smythe! This a half day at Heinemann's store?"

Smythe started as if a knife point had touched him instead of a fingertip. He turned on the Rounder a face the colour of stale paste.

"No," he said faintly. "I—I got leave for a couple of hours. I mean—you made some mistake. I don't think I know you. What may be your pleasure, sir?"

"What may be my pleasure!" chuckled Hooker. "Smythe—you're a bum actor, even if you're a cracker-jack floorwalker." The Rounder's voice took on the high-pitched simper of a seminary sister. "Which is the ribbon counter, please?"

Smythe's face flushed, but he bit.

"Well, what of it? It's as good a job as any and a

darn sight better than some. What can I do for you? I mean—what d'yuh want?"

"You sure forget little favours, Smythe," said Stealthy reproachfully. "Mean t' say you forgotten 't was me introduced the little brown chicken with the blue eyes at the Haymarket one night? 'Member?"

"O-o-oh? . . . Oh, yes," said Mr. Smythe uncomfortably, but with an attempt at a grateful smile. "Don't know that there's any thanks due you, though. She near got me locked up coupla nights ago."

The Rounder pondered this for a moment, then said to himself: "Gee! *That's* who it was—Dayton's little case at Jefferson Market. Thought I'd seen her around somewhere." Then, directly to H. Augustus Smythe: "Well, what did Bancroft have to say?"

"Nothing much. Told me to keep my mouth shut or I might land in Dutch."

"Meaning—you were trying to connect with that million samoleons?"

"Wasn't trying to connect with anything," Smythe grumbled with sudden wary sulkiness.

"Oh, then, maybe you're the missin' Henry Villiers? You're a ringer for him, at that!"

"I'm not saying anything about that, either."

The Rounder pursed his lips and faintly whistled the opening of "The Star-Spangled Banner." He produced the makings and seemed about to roll a cigarette. But he changed his mind and substituted a ready-made cigarette from a packet which he did not offer to Smythe. Quietly, then, he said:

"I'm going to quote you in the *Lark*, Smythe—just

what you've said, with maybe a bit of tapestry on the way you said it."

"No! Don't!" cried Smythe, thoroughly alarmed. "Not just yet, anyway. There's a reason."

"What reason?"

"I don't see it's any of your business."

"Just as you like," said Stealthy, lighting the ready-made cigarette and inhaling its smoke with a kind of sigh. "It's a better story for me just to say your name's Smythe and you work at Heinemann's department store in the daytime and hang around the Haymarket at night."

"Oh, don't do that! Heinemann would fire me if he knew."

"What's the odds to you? You could buy a half interest in Heinemann's as things are now."

A flame leaped into Smythe's eyes. The thought—the possibility—the fact, perhaps, that he indeed might walk into the great department store, slap the head floorwalker in the face, turn a disdainful shoulder on the blonde stenographer who'd made *that* trouble, and even clap a hand of equality on the shoulder of the great Heinemann himself—such possibilities added to the flame of the thought Hooker had engendered.

"Come on! Put something my way, Smythe—I mean, Villiers," said Stealthy in his most wheedling manner. "It's got to come out in a day or two at most, anyway. You got nothing to be ashamed of. The floorwalker was a millionaire in disguise. I'm the only one knows anything about Mr. *Smythe's* doings. Don't worry about me—if you come across. Honest to God, now, you're the millionaire, Henry Villiers!"

At that, Mr. Smythe, as if he had just been challenged with being the Prince of Wales, turned a solemn eye upon Stealthy Hooker and said impressively:

"I—am!"

"Come over to the corner joint an' let's talk it over," said Stealthy presently. "No, not that one. Some of the bunch are there. Let's drift around to the Only William's place."

Half an hour later, within the Only William's oasis, the deal had been made. Hooker had the whole story. The son and heir of Mrs. Villiers had never gone West. He was H. Augustus Smythe, floorwalker, nighthawk, dweller in a hall bedroom. Bancroft, according to Smythe, had confessed himself almost wholly satisfied, but had warned the lucky claimant against talking to the press until certain details and formalities had been covered.

Smythe, or Villiers, had talked to the *Lark*, but, as he was frank to say, on conditions; mainly that Hooker should not reveal the source of his information, denying, as the heir himself would, that he had talked; also, that Mr. Hooker should carefully forget whatsoever he might know of the nocturnal habits of H. Augustus Smythe. Stealthy agreed with him that to reveal these little peccadilloes would be a poor start on his career as "a gentleman of means and leisure."

"Sure!" said Hooker, studying the ash of his curious-smelling cigarette. "Sure. But—say, Villiers, where do I come in on the luck?"

"I don't quite get you," faltered Mr. Villiers.

"Didn't you get an advance from Bancroft?"

"N-no. I—I—he——"

"Oh, can that stuff!" said Hooker gaily. "If I'm to keep quiet about Mr. Smythe and kill a real good story about, say, one of Mr. Smythe's victims that was locked up Saturday night after he'd saved his own hide——"

"Oh, my Lord! You wouldn't do a thing like that!" groaned Mr. Villiers, his weak, sallow face becoming shiny with dampness.

"I'd hate to, but I'd sure know what to do with a half-century right about this time."

There was silence. Villiers was staring in inquisitorial agony at Stealthy Hooker, who sat there thoughtfully flicking ash from his cigarette. Presently Villiers's hand moved and a crisp, new fifty-dollar bill was passed across the table. The Rounder adroitly folded it with his disengaged hand and slipped it into a vest pocket. For a moment he regretted that he had not made it a hundred, but, as Mr. Bisco had remarked to Mr. Drane, there was always a next time. Openly he said to Villiers:

"Much obliged for the story. Now I got to beat it back to Bancroft's, clean up the general story, then slip the real one on top of it.

"With reservations, of course," he added with a wink—"with reservations!"

When the Rounder reappeared in the hall by the door of Bancroft's office he was alone and smiling that smile which ever worries rival reporters.

"Slipped somethin' over, hey?" said Dyer, to whom

the *Sphere* had given the Villiers case as a day space assignment.

"Not a thing, Bo!" was the cheerfully mendacious reply.

"Thought I saw you slip away after one of the claimants," said Dayton of the *Sentinel*. "Get anything out of him?"

"Not a thing—not even civility," said Hooker

Then Bancroft's large figure loomed in the doorway of the law office. He looked weary, but was smiling.

"Step in, gentlemen," said he. "Sorry to have delayed you so long."

The reporters filed in. Bancroft sat down behind his wide, broad, shiny, flat-top desk. His eyes swept the press men's faces keenly and settled with a sudden interest, real or feigned, on the sallow countenance of Melville Hooker.

"Why!" he gasped. "There's a fellow looks enough like the heir to be Henry Villiers himself!"

There was a general laugh, although Dayton, looking at Hooker, fancied a distinct resemblance to the printed picture.

"My wealth, at present," said Stealthy sadly, "consists of exactly sixty cents and a ticket on a pony that missed a date."

Bancroft, who had been studying the face of the Rounder, turned again to the reporters generally.

"But this almost double, unhappily for himself, cannot be considered. The heir, gentlemen, has been found!"

The inevitable questions followed, of course, rising like a Greek chorus.

"Sorry I can't say any more at this time, gentlemen," Bancroft continued. "Certain inquiries—verifications. You know. But," with an amused twinkle, "I thought nothing escaped you sharp young men. The heir walked out of this office less than half an hour ago. He must have passed you in the hall!"

Eyes, accusing and counter accusing, flashed among the reporters. Dayton and Dyer looked at the Rounder suspiciously. That person was studying a steel engraving on Bancroft's wall.

"And that, gentlemen," concluded the lawyer, "is all for to-day. By noon to-morrow, perhaps, I can say more. I promise you rivals that I shall give no interviews to anybody in the meantime."

"Any clue to the assassin?" asked a *Quirinal* reporter.

"I believe not," said Bancroft, rising and holding the hall door open. "That isn't my end of the matter, of course."

As the reporters moved out, adjourning by common consent toward police headquarters, Bancroft tapped Hooker lightly on the shoulder as the Rounder was passing out.

Stealthy went out with the others without apparently having noticed that touch. But after detaching himself from the regulars—a task which they never made difficult—he travelled around the block and returned to Bancroft's office.

When he reëntered the sanctum, Hooker found the lawyer standing at the Broadway side of the room, his back toward the door, his hands clasped tightly behind his broad back and his fingers working nervously.

Apparently his thoughts were far from the maelstrom of traffic below. He was in some sort of uncomfortable reverie from which the entrance of Hooker did not wholly retrieve him at once. He turned with a slightly startled movement and stared at the Rounder.

"Ah! It's you," said he. "Take a seat."

Bancroft himself walked to the office door leading into the public hall and turned the key in the lock. He faced Hooker with a curious, rare indecision in his whole manner. He did not sit down at once; just stood there gazing in a troubled, abstracted way at the man of the Tenderloin night.

Hooker was surprised and not a little on his guard. Presently, as Bancroft still hesitated, walking again to the window and staring unseeingly down at the traffic below, the Rounder took the supposed dilemma by the horns.

"I'm wise, Bancroft," said he with a chuckle.

The lawyer spun around as if attacked from behind. "Wise about what?" he snapped, yet with a note of alarm.

"Oh, I'm the owl on the staff of the *Lark*," said Hooker with a snicker.

"Don't hedge! What are you wise about?"

As he had made the mistake of taking the lead, leaving Bancroft the advantage of following, Hooker came out from cover.

"Smythe—Villiers. I met him in the hall. He squealed. None of the rest of the bunch know, though."

"Ah!" said Bancroft, much surprised, but apparently relieved for some reason. "Ah!"

He studied the Rounder's face, his relief plainly growing as his fear, whatever it was, passed. Then he laughed—a gay laugh of strain relieved—and produced a fat and handsome wallet from an inside pocket of his frock coat. From this he took several bills totaling fifty dollars and placed them on the table.

"Hooker—I want you to be discreet—in several matters."

"Sure," said the Rounder, eyeing the bills but making no move to touch them. He was puzzled, completely puzzled. He could not understand the lawyer's manner, his attitude, his words, that money. Clearly Bancroft was afraid of him, afraid of something he supposed the *Lark* reporter knew and was holding out for future profit.

What could it be? That Bancroft might have some clandestine relationship with the daughter of old Clavering Kimball and feared the Rounder had surmised the truth of it was not enough. That Hooker had identified the Villiers heir, knew something of Smythe's private habits, and had acquired a too-spicy story for the Rialto's *Lark* was not enough either. That story, including every detail of the new millionaire's private life, would be food for the presses, anyway, later if not sooner.

Hooker was at a loss. But he played his little deuces as if he held the suspected four aces. He did not call, but raised the bet. Another lot of bills aggregating another fifty dollars was added by Bancroft to the pile on the desk.

"You're on!" said Hooker, deciding that by calling he would learn what sort of game Bancroft was play-

ing, anyway, and act accordingly in the next deal of the cards.

"Very good," said Bancroft, pushing the money across the table. "In the meantime, here's a little contribution you might devote to—say—helping that little girl in whom Miss Kimball was so interested yesterday morning."

"Sure. Mighty thoughtful of you," murmured Stealthy, folding the bills, after he had ascertained that they represented exactly one hundred dollars, and placing them in his vest pocket with Mr. Villiers's fifty.

He arose and was about to say that if Bancroft had nothing else on his mind he would be going, when the lawyer's telephone buzzed. As the Rounder politely turned his back and moved disinterestedly toward the door, which he unlocked, he heard Bancroft say over the wire:

"Oh—ah—yes. But I can't talk to you just now, my dear. I'll see you this evening . . . Say half-past nine . . . Yes, at the Twenty-eighth Street place . . . Yes. Good-bye."

He hung up the receiver. From the hall doorway the Rounder said: "If anything develops that you can give the *Lark*, call me up, Mr. Bancroft."

"I will, Mr. Hooker. Good-afternoon."

The door closed after the Rounder, who strolled toward the elevator with one hundred and fifty dollars easy money in his vest pocket and two phrases engraved with interrogation points on his mind—"my dear"—and—"the Twenty-eighth Street place."

Chapter VIII

THE DEPARTMENT STORE

THE owlish habits of Melville Hooker had been somewhat disturbed for two days and nights. On the Sunday he had been compelled, through Jefferson Market Court, to forego at least half of his usual day sleep. Through the night of Sunday-Monday the House of the Two Green Eyes had claimed his customary attendance. To-day, Monday, the Villiers case and the interview promised and given by Bancroft had again kept the owl from siesta.

As a general rule he did not appear at the Tenderloin station house before eight or nine o'clock in the evening. It was now about three in the afternoon. Between now and, say, nine o'clock he might make up some lost sleep. But as the way to the owl's rooming-house nest would take him near Heinemann's department store he decided to stop off there and establish a small point about which he had forgotten to question Mr. Smythe-Villiers.

Stealthy felt that he was travelling the main trail of one of those easy-money things which were an important side interest of his so-called newspaper work. In fact, newspaper work was really the side interest—the false front and signboard concealing the real business behind. A card advertisement over the

seat opposite appealed to him vastly. It was for some newfangled hairpin, and its slogan was "Get the Hook!" Stealthy felt that he already had the hook. All he had to do was to find every profitable angle of the Villiers case into which he could sink it!

Within the great ornate main entrance of Heinemann's was a vast stucco figure of Atlas supporting the world—a memorial to the original Heinemann and combining an advertisement for the universality of the Heinemann enterprise. The Atlas, surrounded by a fountain pool (representing the Seven Seas, perhaps), was a popular meeting place for the shopping crowd—and others. The burdened figure always appeared in Heinemann advertising, and the slogan, "Meet Me at the Monument."

Beyond the monument Stealthy encountered a stately person with carefully parted, lustrously pomaded hair and resplendent in a glove-fitting frock coat with a white carnation in the buttonhole. This person, suggesting a cross between a royal chamberlain and a chief steward, was head floorwalker of Heinemann's—and not unconscious of the fact.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, deciding to leave out the "sir" after a swift, disavouring glance over Mr. Hooker's person. He would presently raise a crooked finger as a signal to the store detective. He could not place this type of patron, judge of types though he was. Stealthy lacked that air of slight embarrassment which is peculiar and proper to most adult males visiting a department store.

"You can't do me for anything," said Stealthy with his ingratiating smile. "I'm from the *Lark*."

"Ah! A reporter?" said the head floorwalker coldly, and looking far into the invisible Great West beyond Hooker's head. Heinemann's did not advertise in the *Lark*. "What it is you wish?"

"H. Augustus Smythe works here," stated the Rounder.

"He does. What of it, if I may ask?"

"You may. He's just fallen heir to a million dollars."

"Ah? I had not heard. Interesting—if true."

"When's he gonna quit Heinemann's?"

"I have not the slightest idea, young man! The matter is of no interest to me, whatever. A million dollars, did you say? However—have you any other pleasure?"

"None that would interest you, old top. But you may—ah—direct me to the necktie counter!"

"To your right—extreme rear," snapped the head floorwalker, himself preparing to make a stately approach toward a stout lady who was circumnavigating the Seven Seas in a rudderless sort of way.

Stealthy had no need of a necktie (he had one already—two, in fact), but he wished to look around and locate Smythe-Villiers. The latter had had a half-hour's start from downtown.

He caught sight of him presently. The sallow youth who had waked that morning as H. Augustus Smythe, assistant floorwalker, and was now Henry Villiers, millionaire, was lounging by the notions counter and engaged in a plainly philandering conversation with a girl whose face brought to the Rounder a half shock, half thrill.

It was a pretty face under the exaggerated pompadour which was then in fashion with the straight-front corset. In fact, that face, with the blue eyes, long brown, almost black, lashes, and the general vivid colouring of the Irish near-brunette, would have been beautiful but for a sophisticated insolence, an inviting boldness, about her lips and around the slightly narrowed eyes as she played coquette to the assistant floorwalker's Lothario. Smythe-Villiers, who had appeared at Bancroft's in a suit of well-pressed ready-mades, was now attired in the Heinemann floorwalker uniform, including frockcoat and boutonnière.

It was the revelation of a probably secret phase of the girl's character that almost startled Stealthy Hooker. Standing in the shelter of the stocking counter he watched the pair for a full minute. Once he muttered, "You can't tell a thing about 'em!" For Stealthy, who was seldom at fault for long about a face and identity, found himself looking at a girl he was sure he had seen at least twice before, once when he had introduced her to H. Augustus Smythe as "Dolly Carnation" at the Haymarket, and once again when he had seen her as "Margaret O'Neill" in Jefferson Market Police Court.

"You sure can't tell a thing about 'em," he repeated to himself, adding, "an' they ain't tellin', either."

Just then the head floorwalker, making one of his not infrequent tours of the various counters, sailed past Hooker, caught sight of the delinquents, and, swooping down, addressed a sharp word to both. The girl, with an ill-concealed pout, turned to a woman customer who had been patiently awaiting her salesladyship's

pleasure. Smythe-Villiers turned with an insolent air and said something which seemed to astound his superior.

The heir to a million, stimulated by his new position in the world, was tasting the first sweets of independent wealth. And wealth was the sort of thing, perhaps the only thing, that could impress the chief floorwalker. The latter stared, gaped, seemed about to assert himself for the last time, but weakly surrendered to the presence of one million dollars! The watchful Stealthy Hooker indulged in a saturnine grin as the head floorwalker suddenly bowed, and it was the bow he reserved for only outgoing patrons who had bought well if not wisely. He actually shook hands with the late underling.

The girl behind the notions counter, also watching, smiled as she said to the woman customer who had for the third time inquired about the article she needed:

"Glove counter forward to your left."

"It's curling kids I'm asking for!" wailed the woman customer; "not kid gloves!"

"Hardware department in the basement!" snapped the notions-counter girl.

The woman customer drifted away in a sort of daze. The head floorwalker moved off with an arm about Smythe-Villiers's shoulder and talking to his late subordinate with almost paternal affection. Stealthy Hooker advanced to the notions counter and the girl who was momentarily disengaged.

"H'lo there, Dolly!" was his greeting.

"H'lo ya'self," said she, surreptitiously working a piece of chewing gum to a place in the human mouth

much utilized also by marines on inspection. "But that ain't my name. Where'd ya get that Dolly stuff?"

"Not in Jefferson Market Court, at least."

"Thank God I never been there!" said the girl. "Fresh, ain't ya? Wanta buy somethin'? If ya don't—next time yer passin' keep a-goin'."

Melville Hooker stared at the girl. She was certainly a good actress. Of course, that was to be expected of a girl who could play so many different parts—the saleslady, the woman of the Haymarket, the tearful innocent of the police court.

"Say, kid," said he, "you can't pull that bluff on little Stealthy. It was me introduced you to the guy you just been chinnin' with."

"How long ago was that—and when?" the girl asked with a narrowing of her eyes.

"One Saturday night—about a month ago—in the Haymarket! Your name was Dolly Carnation *then*."

The girl studied the Rounder's face for a few seconds. Slowly a memory aided her to recognition of the man.

"I get ya now," said she. "But what ya want to come shoutin' it around her for? Ya want to get me fired? Buy somethin'—anythin'."

"Let's look over your line of fly swatters—or hair-pins."

"Collar buttons is more your size," she said, producing samples which Stealthy critically examined as he went on:

"It's me you got to thank for gettin' you discharged yesterday morning. I tipped off the judge you were a friend of mine."

For a space the girl stared at him. Then her face grew very pale. But pulling herself together after a frightened glance in the direction of the monument she flashed back at him:

"Can that stuff! I dunno what y'are talkin' about, anyways."

"Oh, all-right-all-right," grinned Stealthy. "Some grateful you are, no-yes? An' you oughta be, seein' I made you acquainted with Smythe Villiers. An' now he's come into a lot of dough don't forget your Uncle Stealthy."

"Oh!" she breathed, surprised. "You onta that? He said I was the only one he'd told."

"You an' me—an' the lawyer, of course. But—say, Dolly—honest to God, now. Looks like he's stuck on you for fair. Play your cards just right an' you can pass up sellin' hairpins an' collar buttons—the which, after due consideration, I don't think I need any to-day."

"He's landed on his feet, ain't he?" said the girl, gathering in the rejected studs. "You leave it to Dolly! Watch me! I'm gonna step out some after he gets the money."

"When's he quittin' Heinemann's?"

"That's just what I'm askin' him when Old Nosey butts in."

"Bet it'll be just exactly prior an' previous to Dolly Carnation quittin' the notions counter," said Stealthy. "Well, I may see him on the way out. So long, Dolly—an' don't forget your friends next time."

He moved away, the girl gazing after him through slightly narrowed eyes. Her face was troubled mo-

mentarily and again slightly pale. She forgot to chew her gum—which was fortunate, as the second assistant floorwalker cruised by just then with the remark:

“Attention, please, Miss O’Neill.”

Stealthy, exploring the intricacies of the main floor, presently sighted Smythe Villiers again. The floorwalker heir was none too pleased when he discovered the identity of the person clapping a hand on his shoulder.

“I can’t talk to you here!” he gasped. “What do you want, anyway—now?”

“Just to ask—I forgot—when you quittin’ Heine-mann’s?”

“To-night,” said Smythe Villiers. “Meant to stay on till the end of the week, but the boss floorman jumped me for a little thing and I shut him up by—er—resigning on the spot.”

“Told him why, of course?”

“Well—I had to.”

“Tell anybody else?”

“Of course not—only Old Nosey.”

“And Dolly Carnation.”

Smythe Villiers’s face crimsoned. He was suddenly resentful with that anger of the weak which is, at first, inarticulate.

“Why did you throw her down Saturday night when she got pinched?” asked the midnight owl who represented the *Morning Lark*. “I been sorta figgerin’ it out that you were the other party.”

Into Smythe Villiers’s eyes came a look of surprise, relief, and, presently, cunning. He regained his composure. In his best floorwalker manner he said:

"I think, Mr. Hooker, you presume upon a very slight acquaintance."

"Well, 't ain't any of my business, at that," Stealthy admitted. "It's nothing to me. But—what's the next move in the big business? When are you going to see Bancroft again about your affairs?"

His affairs! Stealthy had hit upon the right word. The chest of H. Augustus Smythe-Villiers expanded a little.

"He has an appointment with me for this evening to discuss various—er—affairs of mine."

"At the Twenty-eighth Street place?" Stealthy hazarded, but with the casual air of certain knowledge.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the heir. "You seem to know everything."

"It's a gift," said the Rounder modestly. "But it was Bancroft himself told me. Him an' I are pretty thick. What time you goin' there? He's got another appointment—with a dame—about nine-thirty."

"He expects me before that—about nine."

"Well, I'm sure wishin' you all kinda luck, Villiers," said the Rounder genially. "Don't forget old friends when you leave us in the 'knew-him-when' class."

Stealthy had learned all he wished to know about the next movements of the principals in the Villiers case. The floorwalker was to cease to exist that evening. Villiers was to meet his "man of affairs" at the "Twenty-eighth Street place" at 9 P.M. Shortly after that, practically about the same time, Bancroft was to meet "my dear"—a woman, of course—at the same place. Hooker happened to know that neither Bancroft's office nor his residence was within twenty blocks

of the Twenty-eighth Street place. He wondered what sort of establishment the latter might be. But the Tenderloin owl felt that he would have little difficulty in locating its exact street number, either east or west. There were reportorial methods, and Hooker had his own to boot. He felt confident that he would be on hand at that place to see all goings and comings. He would get a look at that woman—"my dear." If he did not know her already, he would certainly know her thereafter. If he did recognize her, he might understand what connection, if any, there was between her appointment with Bancroft and Villiers's appointment with the same person about the same time, and if the coincident appointments had anything to do with the case of a rich old lady who had gone and got herself strangled to death. . . .

In the meantime he could get at least a few hours sleep.

As he left Heinemann's he made a point of passing the notions counter again. He did not stop, but threw a smirk from one side of his mouth in the direction of the girl he knew as Dolly Carnation in one place and Margaret O'Neill in another. Her response was a subtle, almost intimate twitch of a long-lashed eyelid.

Melville Hooker, contrasting in his mind the brazen girl of the Haymarket with the penitent Magdalen of the police court, was smiling wryly as he walked a few blocks north on Seventh Avenue to the rooming house bed in which he slept at intervals.

"You can't tell a thing about 'em!" he laid down once more as an axiom. "An' when you do you're only guessin'!"

Chapter IX

SPRING MADNESS

DURING the hours which elapsed between the noon adjournment of Jefferson Market Court that Sunday and his going to an almost sleepless night in the bachelor hotel near Times Square, where he was staying, Oren Grell moved with Frances Kimball in a half day-dream which, to her secret wonder, she found herself sharing.

It would be difficult to explain what had happened to these two at the instant of their meeting; as futile as trying to bottle sunshine or explain magnetism.

Spring was on the land, as they discovered with surprise and delight when, after a light luncheon together in a city restaurant, they took the elevated railway and an hour later found themselves in Bronx Park.

For Frances Kimball there was a sense of sudden divorce from that world where erring humanity is all more or less on probation. Jefferson Market Police Court—even J. Loudon Bancroft—appeared remote in distance and a kind of vaguely remembered nightmare. Only of that man she thought at intervals with the feeling of a raw, cold draught upon her present physical and mental comfort. In the propinquity of

Oren Grell the thought of Bancroft was curiously disturbing.

A kind of gentle madness was upon her. She knew that much. At least, she tried to assure herself that that was it—only that. It was a thrall, such as comes to one while reading a love story, or witnessing a love scene in a play, when the reader or onlooker (a woman, in this case) becomes the person embraced, kissed, and pouring out uncontrolled, half-inarticulate, emotional admissions to a lover of the hour's imaginative creation. Grell, on his side, told himself that Frances Kimball was the hitherto unknown goddess miraculously brought within arm's reach. Of course, he felt sure that he had always known her—if not in this life, at least in some previous incarnation. In any event, he accepted the generosity of the gods or their mill grinders as but the culminating gift to one for whom heaven, earth, and all things therein, thereon, and under were specially designed!

The gods, beholding these two, may have smiled over their handiwork. A mere mortal outsider, gifted not with the language of the gods, would assuredly have stated the matter as an acute case of love at first sight. Why else did the smallest detail concerning his life from earliest infancy interest her as never Lives of the Great had done? Why else, learning of her probation work, did Grell suddenly discover in himself a vast yearning to devote his life to the amelioration of the condition of the poor, or the uplifting of the fallen, and picture himself as some godlike Samaritan? Why else did Grell, who hated sugar in his tea, beg three lumps from the divine hand when they sat to-

gether in a bower of the old Hermitage near the park?

Spring madness . . . nympholepsy . . . call it what you will. It had them in its all-powerful grasp that day. And when evening came, and in a sudden determination to recover her individuality, bidding him a temporary farewell at a street corner in the West Eighties, near Madison Avenue, she forbade him to see her home. He accepted his dismissal only on condition that he be allowed to meet her again on the following day in order to accompany her on that proposed visit to the home of Margaret O'Neill.

When they met again next day, Monday—about the same time the reporters were camped before Bancroft's office and the newspapers were trumpeting the "Villiers Murder Mystery"—it was as if they had not been apart overnight. The hours of separation had made for closer communion and a corresponding ripening of intimacy.

The West Side elevated railway branch carried them to the station nearest the O'Neill place. The rattle and roar of the train racing over steel trestles allowed of little conversation, for which they were slightly thankful. Frances allowed Grell to see her to the rickety gate before the antiquated frame house with its stringless vine and almost paintless boards. She left him leaning against the elm, which the permanent flagstones were slowly but surely killing, while she entered Felix O'Neill's house.

The probation lady was within not more than half an hour. When she rejoined Grell by the dying elm he noted with less surprise than sentimental stirrings that her eyes were shining with tears!

"You shouldn't let things upset you too much," he said.

"I don't—as a rule," she said, winking back the tears. "In my work one has to remember, as doctors must, what somebody once said—Pasteur, wasn't it?—that 'Pity as an emotion passes, while Pity as a motive remains.' But I don't know what's gone wrong with me! I feel as if I wanted to have a good cry over something, any old thing. Then again I feel that I hate it all, its sordidness, and want to get away to a desert island or something!"

"Let's go—out of this, at least," he eagerly seconded.

Half an hour later they were crossing the Hudson River by ferry to Fort Lee. They sat on the forward deck. The weather was still warmly redolent of spring in New York. His hand found hers and lay gently upon gloved fingers which she did not withdraw.

At Fort Lee they took the trolley car which hair-pinned over tortuous ascending tracks to the Palisades. Just beyond the summit where they alighted the woods spread back of the high precipices.

They came upon an old oak tree which the gods had once seeded there for the ultimate trapping of a pair of mortals. It spread its branches benignly. The shaded ground around its bole was smooth and alluring. At a respectable distance around it the thicket closed in as if that, too, had been part of the design conceived before these two were born.

They halted, both looking at the bower beneath the oak branches.

"The peace and beauty of it!" she whispered.

Still he said nothing. She turned, confused, helpless to do or say anything further to relieve the silence.

"Frances," he said, holding out his hands.

He advanced slowly to her where she stood facing him, her own eyes filled with soft fear, albeit no amazement. She made no move until his arms were about her. Then her head fell upon his shoulder, her face half-upturned, her eyes closed.

Until past noon they sat under that oak tree in the Palisades woods. Mainly they talked about each other, with occasional side excursions of thought on her side which were not always given utterance.

"It'll be all right with my governor," said Grell. "How about Mr. Kimball?"

She was suddenly filled with a kind of panic. Not that Clavering Kimball was likely to raise any great objection. He might be glad! It was a panic of doubt concerning herself, the genuineness of her own feelings, their permanence.

If only she could see Loudon for a moment, just a moment. After all, she had only just met this boy. The comparison with Jim Bancroft's dominant personality might clear her vision of this rosy mist; dispel this lovely mirage which she did not wish to dispel.

But why deny herself at all! She felt that she loved; felt love in a way it had never touched her before. It was only that doubt of herself. If only she could get away from the object of it, see Jim Bancroft, even tell him about it, hear him laugh, or scoff, or see a ferocity of jealousy leap into his eyes. He had said that he would realize he had lost her if she ever mar-

ried anyone else. She had admitted that she would miss him if he forswore the Platonic allegiance. Now she knew that she did not love Bancroft, never had loved him, never could. But to see him again, look into his face, hear him speak, even—would somehow aid her to a decision whether she was in love with Oren Grell or merely suffering a somewhat acute attack of biologic spring madness!

It was after she and Grell had eaten a rather belated luncheon in a little restaurant near the Fort Lee ferry house that she excused herself and called Bancroft's office on the telephone.

The lawyer seemed surprised to receive a call from her during business hours. He was distinctly abrupt and sounded a little impatient. Still, he had briefly agreed to a meeting for that evening at half-past nine. Until then she felt more at liberty to indulge in her pleasant idyll with Grell.

They returned to the woods. The progress of their love was becoming swift. She found herself stroking the rumpled fair hair of a head which lay upon her knees as she sat with her back against the oak bole, her eyes closed in a daydream. And a little later, when she decided they ought to return to the city, she broke from his arms with an inarticulate cry of protest.

"This won't do. I must go. I—I'm not myself," she said rather wildly, while her hands nervously travelled to her bosom, then to her hair. "It is time, anyway. I have an engagement for this evening."

Grell was staring, not at her, but at the gathering

shadows among the trees, trying to recover his own shaken control.

"With whom?" he asked sullenly.

She did not answer the question, but said with sudden coolness,

"My hat, please."

"I beg your pardon," he mumbled as he recovered himself and served her request. "I meant—what time?"

"Oh, not until after nine," she said, relenting.

"Then I may have you till then?"

"I ought to go home. My father hasn't been well of late."

But she did not return to the Kimball residence in the West Eighties. They dined together in a restaurant overlooking the Hudson River from Riverside Park. They lingered over the liqueur glasses, their eyes seeing only each other's reflecting the many spangling lights of the mighty river.

When it was time for her to go he procured a hansom—the last horse hansom he ever rode in. They were becoming scarce.

"Where do you live?" asked Grell, discovering with some surprised that he knew so little of the woman the impression of whose yielding lips still lingered on his own.

"If you will just drop me—say at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street. That is near enough."

"I am not to meet your father?"

"Not yet," she said as the hansom jolted southward like a giant rickshaw. "And you are not to see me either for a day or two, young man! I must sober up."

So must you, dear. We must enter into a period of meditation, as it were. I'll call you up when I'm ready—at this bachelor establishment where you say you live."

He thought he understood, and why she refused to let him know where she lived. But when he had pressed her hand and whispered a lover's *au revoir* at a brilliantly lighted corner of the richest avenue in the world and walked away without attempting to see in which direction she disappeared, he, who was capable of so much delicacy, went straight to a drug store and looked up "Kimball" in the street directory.

He found the home address of Clavering Kimball, whose daughter, if she lived at all with her father, did not reside anywhere near Fifth Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street.

Chapter X

MR. BANCROFT IS WORRIED

LESS than ten minutes after leaving Oren Grell, Frances Kimball entered the hall of an apartment house in Twenty-eighth Street, not more than three blocks east of Fifth Avenue. A Negro boy, serving alternately as operator of telephone switchboard and elevator, greeted her with a grin of recognition. He promptly plugged in on the switchboard and said:

"Miss Forrest, suh . . . Yessuh!"

Pulling the plug out he turned to his other office, in the elevator cage.

"Yass'm. Mist' Pres'cott bin expeck'n yo'."

Her entrance to the apartment house had been observed. The Rounder was smoking a cigarette in the shadows of a stable alley directly across the street.

"'Oh, say, can you see?'" murmured Mr. Hooker, recognizing the lady—who was doubtless "my dear"—as the probation lady of Jefferson Market Police Court.

After some three hours' sleep the Rounder had posted himself where he could command a view of the downtown and uptown exits of the subway station at Twenty-eighth Street and Lexington Avenue. He had decided on this as the most likely spot at which

to pick up the trail of J. Loudon Bancroft. The lawyer, he had reassured himself by reference to a street directory, had his regular residence listed as in the West Fifties, and Stealthy knew that his business office was far down Broadway, on the edge of the financial district. If this East Twenty-eighth Street place of his were some unofficial, or secret, retreat, the lawyer would be most likely to come to it on foot from the nearest station of that comparatively new subway which was the swiftest and best means of making any considerable stride about Manhattan Island.

Stealthy, who had early decided against the somewhat malodorous *West* Twenty-eighth Street of that time, had reasoned well. Bancroft came out of the downtown exit mosque about eight forty-five and walked half a block west to a modern apartment house squeezed between an old-fashioned brownstone residence and a so-called family hotel. The Rounder, following, stepped in the shadow of that stable alley opposite where Bancroft entered. The lawyer was taken up in the elevator by a Negro boy who apparently needed no instructions. The watcher smiled his satisfaction while he reached for his packet of ready-made cigarettes—changing his mind, however, and rolling a smoke from the makings. There seemed never any reason for this choice, or for carrying both kinds of smoking material, for he never offered anyone a cigarette of any sort. If he were asked for one—which not infrequently happened—he produced only the makings, never the ready-mades.

He was in the act of wetting the rolled cigarette

when, glancing up, he paused, becoming as rigid as a pliant rattlesnake coiled for action. Then the smile on his sallow face became one of vast self-satisfaction as he saw H. Augustus Smythe approaching that same apartment house. The satisfaction was over the fact that he had saved himself trouble and gained several hours' sleep by not dogging the floorwalker since 3 P. M. Smythe, keeping his appointment with Bancroft, would have been bound to lead a shadower to that indefinite "Twenty-eighth Street place." Stealthy had located it and Bancroft by his own methods, and arrived there ahead of Mr. Smythe-Villiers.

But there was vast interest as well as satisfaction in his smile as he plastered down the wetted cigarette paper, gave the ends a slight twist and stuck the product between his lips.

Stealthy did not strike a match to light that cigarette until H. Augustus had disappeared into the apartment house. That was about thirty minutes before Miss Kimball went up in the elevator. Then the Rounder shielded the little flame in the cup of his hands.

The joy of the preceding thirty-six hours departed from Frances Kimball as she went up in the elevator of that Twenty-eighth Street apartment house. There were faint drawn lines about her face as she came to the door of "Mr. Prestcott's" apartments.

She did not have to ring. He was awaiting her, his broad brow knitted in a heavy frown. He seemed lacking in his usual air of genial, comradely welcoming.

There was nothing to be disturbed about, except that he suddenly realized that Frances might not like the situation. As "Miss Forrest" she had covered

Miss Kimball in her visits to "Mr. Prescott," who, outside of these apartments, was her cavalier escort to theatres and restaurants of an at least surface-respectable night life. She had never met anyone in these apartments except Jim Bancroft. At that, there was really nothing for which she need feel shame or regret, save as the Mrs. Grundy of that era might not have approved or generously construed. It was only a phase of her and her manner of living—like the latch-key to her father's house, the probation work for Jefferson Market Police Court, the liqueurs over which she lingered with Bancroft at places like Henley's, and the publicly banned cigarettes which she could smoke to her nerves' content in the Prescott apartments—all a relief and refuge from the boredom of a still half-Victorian society.

She was startled when a cautioning finger Bancroft raised to his lips told her that he had another visitor. It was too late to retreat without making matters worse when her dominating cavalier escort said in his fine carrying voice:

"Well, well! So you got my message? So glad you could come. I wished particularly to have you meet an interesting client of mine who, I'm sure, will be delighted to have your friendship. It's just the kind of thing he needs at this stage of his affairs."

"But—Jim!" she whispered reproachfully.

"It's all right," he returned, breathing the words as he relieved her of her cloak. "It's young Villiers—discovered heir to that fortune you probably read about in to-day's papers—Villiers Case, you know. Had to have him here so we could get away from

reporters. Besides—"a dawning inspiration seemed to oil his tongue—"I rather depended on your coming while he was here. I have a particular reason for wishing you to meet him—help me put him at his ease. It's rather important to me, my dear. You can do that much to help."

He had taken and was holding her hand during the latter part of the speech. Now she withdrew it, somehow resenting the "my dear" and his general air of proprietorship. Nevertheless, she entered the den and presently found herself shaking hands indifferently with a somewhat nervous, stiffly dressed young man whose manners would have been excellent had they not been so patently artificial.

"My secretary, Miss Forrest," was Bancroft's way of making her known to H. Augustus.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am—Miss Forrest," said the ex-floorwalker, bowing profoundly and perspiring visibly.

Nevertheless, he was plainly flattered and not at all unconscious of the ladylike manner and beauty of "Miss Forrest." In the course of the next five minutes, expanding under her gracious smile and Bancroft's respectful manner of encouraging him to talk, the young man found himself gaining, not only poise, but—well, after all, he was a millionaire, wasn't he?—and Bancroft merely his man of affairs—and this lovely woman his lawyer's stenog. He became possessed of a self-confidence born of a sudden mental cocktail.

After Bancroft—by way of toasting the heir's health and good fortune—had shaken a real cocktail,

which Frances did not decline and Villiers was fool enough to drink, the late employee of Heinemann's Universal Department Store expressed himself quite freely on a number of subjects, any old subject. Also, he began to display a most gallant interest in "Miss Forrest," and was even a little condescending in his remarks to J. Loudon Bancroft. Already, as he gazed into the dark eyes of this attractive secretary, the ex-floorwalker was dreaming a dream. Why shouldn't he? She was certainly a good-looker; a lady, too, even if working for a living. She had lots of education and refinement, while he had lots of money coming to him.

Encouraged by Bancroft, he repeated the story he had told that day in the lawyer's office. Frances sipped her cocktail and seemed hardly to be listening, despite her gracious smile. Her mind was still more than half in that other world which she had inhabited for nearly two days: that kiss under the oak tree. In a vague way, too, resentment still rankled that Bancroft should have allowed this meeting with a third party—here.

"Well, as I told you," young Villiers was saying, "I never did go West, as the papers said. It was the old lady—Mother, I mean. I just couldn't seem to please her, and honest to G— goodness, she didn't please me a whole lot, either. Mind you, I got nothing against the old dame—my mother. She's sure done right by me, though maybe she didn't mean to. It just happened that way. If she hadn't died sudden she mighta left her money to a cat-an'-dog home or given it away to them he-ladies she always had hangin' around.

"She didn't do a thing to make me like her. Honest to God, she acted like she hated me. Mother was sugar for the flies, but she'd grudge me a penny for a lolilpop. One time she locked me down in the cellar durin' one of her re-ceptions, just because I'd walked in on a previous show. Before that I'd always been told to keep out—like she didn't want her beaux to think she was old enough to *have* a son my age. I was about fifteen then.

"Anyway—after that cellar business I was through! I didn't think to figure on her havin' a lot of money to leave. She never showed *me* any. I ran away and never went back. Maybe it was her—she—as first said I went to the wild West"—Bancroft conceded the point—"and maybe she said it because she hoped I had! Leastways, she never tried awful hard to find me. I was never out of New York; never been in my life—though just you watch me when I get my money! Worked at lots of odd jobs, startin' with sellin' newspapers. Finally got a position wrappin' parcels in Heinemann's and worked up in seven years to assistant floorwalker. I had my eye on bein' head floorman some day." He laughed at that now! "For five cents I'da busted the chief in the eye this afternoon. Him talkin' to me like I was a fifteen-dollar counter jumper!"

"Well, of course, you can forget all that now," said Bancroft, with an amused side glance at the unamused Frances Kimball. "But for the present," he went on more gravely, "I wish to repeat my warning about talking with newspaper men. You do not fancy, I take it, Sunday specials with pictures covering the romance

of rising from floorwalker to millionaire between sunrise and sunset? Another thing—the mystery of your mother's—er—passing is something upon which the district attorney and the detective bureau will presently be cross-examining you; seeking, naturally, to know where you were before, during, and after the probable time of her—ah—misfortune.

“Just where were you, anyway? I mean, how did you spend Saturday evening and night, during the hours between Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning? The thing happened in the meantime, you know.”

“Well, the store closes later Saturday evenings,” said Villiers, losing some of his self-confidence.

“Then, I suppose, you had supper and, perhaps, went to a show or something?”

“No, didn't go to no show—'s far's I can remember. I mean—I spent the evening in my room. I'm generally blame' tired Saturday nights. Go to a show week-nights once in a while.” His voice faded out curiously.

“I see,” said Bancroft quickly. “Then we needn't worry about that. We'll see your landlady. Probably she, or some of the other roomers, can testify you were at home all evening and presumably went to bed at the usual hour.”

“I—I guess so,” said Villiers, his face rather pale. “Only—I didn't see any of them—speak to any of them—and I don't know as how any of them saw me—which it ain't none of their business, anyhow, whether I was to home or not.”

The lawyer eyed him steadily for a few seconds.

Bancroft knew his client was evading, if not actually lying. The young man, on his side, would have found relief just then in telling his man of affairs just where he *had* been—and some things embarrassingly connected with the history of that night. He needed advice before the district attorney or the detective bureau knew that he had been found and came asking pointed questions. Only—this Miss Forrest being present—he did not care to have so refined a lady hear that he had been philandering around a notorious resort and how he had nearly been arrested through that fool skirt.

Bancroft changed the subject, meaning to return to it when there was no embarrassing third party present.

"By the way," asked the lawyer, "after you left my office to-day did you happen to be spoken to by a person named Hooker?"

The question seemed to make Villiers ill. His face glistened with a sheen of dampness. His eyes widened and his underlip moved loosely. At the same time Miss Kimball appeared to become less uninterested.

"Yes—I—I did. He was a newspaper man and seemed to know an awful lot about me."

"True or otherwise?—or just guesswork?" Bancroft inquired sharply.

"Oh, I dunno. Knew where I worked. Called me 'Smythe.' Said he knew I was 'Villiers,' too, an'—" he suddenly blurted it out—"said he was going to print a big story unless——"

"You paid him money?"

"I—I gave him fifty dollars. I thought maybe you wouldn't want anything printed until it was all settled."

His voice again died out, while Bancroft, muttering, got up and began to pace about the room. Perhaps his agitation was due to the memory of himself having paid that same Hooker twice fifty dollars just half an hour later. Possibly there was more than that behind his disturbance. Frances Kimball, at least, wondered at it, not knowing about that other bribe to silence. She had discovered an interest of intrigue in the conversation at the introduction of Hooker's name. She had not caught just how that name had been brought into the talk. She had just heard it and listened thereafter with attention. She knew Hooker, of course—that is, less Hooker than *of* Hooker. As she had told Bancroft, she occasionally found his trail across the line of her probation work, and always it was the trail of the serpent. But what had Hooker to do with this business, the murder of a rich old woman and the luck of a floorwalker who was heir to her not inconsiderable estate?

Miss Kimball glanced at, and followed with her eyes, the restless, moving figure of Bancroft. She had never seen him so savagely preoccupied. The matter of Hooker squeezing fifty dollars out of his client. Of course! Naturally irritating. But it was not like Jim Bancroft to let anything ruffle his Jovian front at any time. Then it drifted into her mind: Henley's restaurant, and the newspaper boys at the table across the room, and Bancroft's inquiring about a "reporter named Hooker." She recalled that she had not drawn his attention to Hooker's actual proximity until after she had answered his question. If he had known the man by sight and seen him across the room, he would

hardly have asked about him unless he *had* seen him. But the main thing, the thing that struck her now, was J. Loudon's inquiry about a reporter named Hooker on the very night that Mrs. Villiers was murdered, before the body had been found and before Bancroft could ordinarily have learned of the tragedy. And now, in connection with that tragedy, this "reporter named Hooker" came up again.

Then, next morning, in court, before Mr. Dayton of the *Sentinel* brought that pink extra and apparently startled Jim Bancroft with the sensational news it featured, his having asked her to point out this Hooker person again so, probably, that he could create some opportunity to talk with the man, a person who (Bancroft had said) "was slightly incidental in a case on hand."

Curious, if merely coincidence. Frances found herself studying the face of her Platonic intimate as he still moved about the room, his hands clasped behind his back, his fingers twining and untwining, and his lips moving as if he muttered inaudibly. For the time being he seemed to have forgotten the presence of anybody else. The heir to the murdered woman's fortune plainly sensed trouble without wholly understanding its nature, save as it, and this Hooker person, might constitute some menace to himself if not to his man of affairs.

Frances Kimball, on her part, became convinced that Jim Bancroft had something on his conscience as well as his mind. She thought again in that moment of Oren Grell, and an oak tree, and the tricky kaleidoscopic mind flashed in a memory of why her father and

some newspapers spoke none too generously of J. Loudon Bancroft. As a lawyer, they hinted, his methods in some cases were not above suspicion, though always short of possible disbarment. That was all. But for the moment she believed it. She had never done so before. And it hurt.

Frances Kimball left the "Prestcott" apartments first of the trio. She pleaded a headache. Bancroft did not try to detain her, and even seemed glad when she declined an escort and took advantage of a cab summoned by telephone and the Negro in the hall. In fact, the lawyer seemed for once relieved at her departure. He did not know—and did not bother to think just then—why she had chosen to come. He had troubles of his own that he wished to mull over. He did not know that she had wished merely to sense the stabilizing presence which ordinarily made her level headed but for once had utterly failed in that effect. She yearned for Oren Grell and unreasoning love; also forgetfulness of probation work, latchkeys, and the freedom of action that went with both.

Following Miss Kimball's unescorted departure, the ex-floorwalker, on the nervous edge, had poured out to his man of affairs some previously suppressed details of his recent history, especially about his having been recognized as an habitual Tenderloin rounder by that Hooker fellow who had taken fifty dollars from him as the price of discretion in that matter of having been all but arrested Saturday night. H. Augustus had not thought it necessary to supply any overburden of detail, and Bancroft had not seemed to think such details

essential to complete understanding of his client's predicament.

"All right!" said the lawyer irritably. "Hooker's a crook and a stool pigeon! You've paid him fifty dollars to keep his mouth shut. Let it go at that price. It may help you in proving an alibi, at that. But if he, or anyone else, tries the blackmail game again, and as a moneyed man with a Haymarket record you may find yourself not immune to the coercive touch—send him to me! I know how to deal with him—his kind, I mean."

Then, making an open appointment for the heir apparent at his business office next day, Bancroft dismissed his client, sending him out into the night.

Left alone in "Mr. Prestcott's" apartments, Bancroft had resumed his restless paces about the floor of the den.

"Hooker! Damn him! What the devil does he know?" he asked himself repeatedly. And in the end: "How *much* does he know?"

As a matter of fact, to date, Stealthy Hooker knew no more than just one hundred and fifty dollars' worth. And on that he had already cashed in.

Chapter XI

PULLING THE CHESTNUTS

MELVILLE HOOKER was adept, also, in the subtleties of newspaper work—of a kind. True, he had accepted fifty dollars from Smythe Villiers and one hundred dollars from Bancroft. But that was not so much to suppress news of the heir's having been found as to use discretion regarding certain details of that heir's personality and recent history.

It was too bad, of course, that a good story should have to be shelved for the moment; especially as within twenty-four hours Bancroft's formal announcement of the finding of the Villiers heir would be made, and the other hounds of the press would trail down every scent leading to every detail of the ex-floorwalker's life since his departure from his mother's cellar seven years before.

Too bad. But, of course, there were always ways, known to all newspaper men, though despised by most, of getting around the little difficulty of tied hands. That was why Stealthy Hooker was talking in a corner of the House with a grave-eyed Dayton of the *Sentinel*.

"You been pretty decent to me, Dickie," said the *Lark* man in that way of his which curiously never gave offense, "and as it'll make the *Lark's* story sound

more like the goods to have one other paper carry it, I'm passing it on to you. 'If you see it in the *Sentinel*—it's so.' If you see it only in the *Lark*—maybe!" He grinned, having no illusions about the Rialto midnight organ's reliability. "But you don't have to pass it on to the Combine bunch. It's not directly a House story, but part of your special day assignment on Bancroft-Villiers downtown. See?"

"Yes," said the *Sentinel* man without inflection.

Then Mr. Hooker, having assured himself and convinced Dayton that the Combine could fairly be kept in ignorance, admitted that he had identified and talked with the Villiers heir that afternoon outside of Bancroft's office. The man had been a floorwalker in Heinemann's Universal Department Store under the name of H. Augustus Smythe. Bancroft, also challenged, had admitted that Smythe and the missing Henry Villiers were one and the same. If Dayton couldn't take his (Stealthy's) word for it, he could verify the main fact by calling up Heinemann, or Bancroft. The Rounder much regretted that he didn't know as yet just where Smythe Villiers lived, except that——

"Tell you somethin' else, though you can't print more about it at present than, say, that the heir has been a familiar figure in Tenderloin night life for some time, although neither he nor his acquaintances ever suspected him as a coming millionaire. Anyway—you remember that girl case Saturday night—girl you were interested in Sunday morning in Jeff. Court?"

"Yes. I saw her arrested," said Dayton.

"That right? She'd been chinning with a man on the Haymarket corner, the usual charge?"

"Yes."

"Well, the fellow she was chinning with was this H. Augustus Smythe Villiers. I tumbled to him after I seen his picture in the papers. He looked a bit like me when I was younger. Even Bancroft noticed that, remember? The girl's face was familiar, too. I was playin' poker in Casey's when she was brought in here, but when I lamped her in court I knew I'd seen her before somewhere. Then, when I saw Smythe come out of Bancroft's office, it all come back to me. I'd met this Smythe around the joints once or twice and seen that same girl with him, too. She calls herself O'Neill daytimes and works in Heinemann's store, notions counter. Night-time she plays around a bit as 'Dolly Carnation.' So much for your little innocent of Jeff. Market Court!"

Dayton's brows came together in anger, or disbelief, or impatience. But he said nothing.

"Well, to make it short," Stealthy went on, "one night a coupla months ago it was me made 'em acquainted—in the Haymarket, or Finnegan's Rathskeller—I forget which—without havin' much acquaintance with either of 'em myself. You know how it is in them dives. So long as you're formally introduced it don't matter how much you know about the introducer. There's nothing like helping a little game along, anyway. Outside of Bancroft's office, after just one slant at Smythe, I laid for him and took a flyer. He admitted he was Smythe—an' Villiers, too. His chest swelled so that the wealthy admission come out

in the deflation. Bancroft had to admit it, too, when I went back after you fellas beat it for headquarters.

"And there you are! I'm just tellin' you how I arrived so's to show you I've got the goods. But you got to go easy on the Tenderloin end on account of the bunch—see? It's too near home. The Combine 'ud say you'd oughta come across with *that*."

"The *Sentinel* wouldn't lean heavy on that stuff, anyway," said Dayton.

"I know," chuckled Stealthy. "It don't quite come under their head of 'all the news that's printable.'"

Dayton considered in silence.

First, he had not the slightest doubt in his mind that Hooker was sharing his scoop through no altruistic motive but to cover himself in a small breach of ethics. Stealthy was probably achieving his release from some obligation by providing himself with an alibi—that "the *Sentinel* got wind of it, somehow," and he "had to protect himself and his job with the *Lark*!" These considerations did not worry Dayton. He was glad to get the news as long as he himself could print it without a personal breach of ethics.

The main thing he was considering was whether Stealthy was dealing with facts or—"Larking." But the Rounder's conception of the Saturday night incident of the girl and the man (part of which, at least, Dayton knew to be hard fact), Hooker's recognition of the girl in court (and, later, the man involved) sounded plausible. What was more convincing was the Rounder's first identifying the picture of Smythe, or Villiers, and later matching it with an original in his own mental gallery because of a likeness to himself.

That was almost confirmation, especially in view of Bancroft's half-jocular remark to the newspaper men assembled in his office that Hooker "looked enough like the heir to be Villiers himself."

Nevertheless, it was not verification enough for the highly conservative *Sentinel*.

"Thanks, Hooker," said Dayton. "Maybe I can do you a turn some time."

Dayton presently left the House and hurried to a booth telephone in a Sixth Avenue drug store. He had no means of locating Smythe Villiers. Bancroft was his first call. He rang up the lawyer's residence in the West Fifties with all a zealous reporter's disregard for hours. Central's report, after some delay, was that the "number doesn't answer." Then Dayton tried the residence of the reigning Heinemann, as a last resort.

He got Mr. Heinemann, son of the late, great, original Heinemann, got him out of bed to answer the 'phone with a snarl of rage. Of course, Mr. Dayton of the *Sentinel* was sorry, and Heinemann's advertised largely in the *Sentinel*, and the matter was not in the least hurtful to Heinemann's store—the contrary, rather. In the end Heinemann quieted down.

"Yes, it is true," he informed Dayton. "The young man resigned to-day on that account. Sorry to lose him, of course, but you may say that the staff and employees of Heinemann's Universal Department Store are as one in being overjoyed over their late associate's great good fortune."

That was enough to go upon. Dickie Dayton, hanging up, glanced at the time. Nearly 2 A. M. The

first edition was gone. Just as well. Better for the last edition. The other morning papers would have no chance, or time, to copy and rewrite the matter as their own industrious gleaning. They'd be beaten badly, unless the *Lark's* first edition. . . . But he had seen that, and it had contained no more of the Villiers case than the late afternoons had carried.

Within five minutes Dayton was back in the House of the Two Green Eyes after having shot the "new lead" over the telephone to the *Sentinel* office. In the House he received a sharp, inquiring glance from the Sphinx.

"Slippin' something over?" asked the Central Syndicate man, polishing his spectacles with a dingy handkerchief.

"Maybe."

"Huh?" ejaculated Deeming of the *Clarion*, surprised.

"Outside stuff," said Dayton tersely. And that was all. It was none of the Combine's business.

About three o'clock in the morning Dayton, calling it a night, dropped in at the *Sentinel* office on the way to his rooms. He knew the staff would have a smile for the man who had beaten everything that morning but the *Lark*. Besides, Dayton had the reporter's hunger to see a news achievement in cold type—just what sort of "head," and how much "double-leading," paid tribute to the degree of news importance.

He walked up the now almost deserted Rialto to the Sentinel Building. He nearly always walked it. His rooms were just a few blocks beyond, north and

west. He liked to breathe comparatively fresh air after a night in the atmosphere of the green lamps. He found himself thinking of that Irish girl, Margaret O'Neill, and what Hooker had said about her. Probably it was a case of a rebellious, discontented girl who worked in a store all day and at night found relief in a taste of life—more or less free—probably more—where the lights were brightest. Dayton was conscious of a sense of disappointment. He refused to believe himself such a poor judge of character when swift estimate of character was his professional business. To-morrow, perhaps, he would look up that girl at Heinemann's, discover where he had slipped up. He had an idea that following her up might have some other outcome, too; perhaps another lead to the floorwalker heir—even to the Villiers murder mystery. You never could tell—especially when a little news hunch whispered.

His addition to the Villiers story had been featured heavily. In the *Sentinel* office he was presently looking over the fresh edition and receiving compliments from such of his associates as had not gone home. Glancing over the rest of the front page his eye fell upon another heavily leaded, though shorter, story. Its bold headlines announced that Clavering Kimball, financier, had been found dead in his residence in West Eighty ——th Street.

The Kimball butler had discovered the body lying on the floor to which the late financier had fallen from a chair in the library. The family physician, Dr. Cyrus Gregg, immediately summoned, had pronounced death due to a heart seizure. He had not been well

of late, and to the strain of recent business anxieties in the Street the physician attributed much. Miss Frances Kimball, the daughter, admired and respected for her voluntary probation work in connection with Jefferson Market Police Court, had been absent from home during the day, returning before midnight to be greeted by Dr. Gregg with the tragic news of her father's sudden end. She was prostrated, the report continued, before going into biographic details. Dr. Gregg remaining in attendance as physician and old friend of the family.

"I'm sorry for Miss Kimball," said Dayton to himself, seeing her in his mind's eye as she had been yesterday morning when she took that girl—the O'Neill girl—in hand. That tearful little sinner had fooled the probation lady, too. He wondered if Frances Kimball would keep on with probation work. Now more than ever, perhaps. Personal sorrow has that altruistic result sometimes. Much depended, of course, upon whether she could afford it. There had been rumours of Kimball having been squeezed in that recent break of the market. Dayton hoped for Miss Kimball's sake. . . . She had struck him as being of the type that, spoiled by moneyed indulgence, might miss the crutch of independent means.

"It's a queer world," he muttered with a wry smile, turning his eyes from the Kimball tragedy to that story of the floorwalker who had suddenly found himself a millionaire.

There were, of course, several still damp copies of the *Morning Lark* in the *Sentinel* office. The damper other newspaper editions came the more useful their

contents. The *Lark's* latest edition had the Villiers identification, too, of course, with such phrases as "FLOORWALKER," "TENDERLOIN HABITUÉ," and "VILLIERS MILLIONS" in the three-column head. Again Dayton smiled, amusedly this time.

"Stealthy had to get someone to pull his chestnuts out of the fire before he could handle them himself," he decided.

Chapter XII

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

THE first thing next morning Oren Grell saw the news of Clavering Kimball's death in the newspaper which was left at his door "with the compliments of the management."

He searched hurriedly for "Kimball, Clavering," in a telephone directory. Only the financier's business office was listed. Breaking his fast with no more than a cup of coffee, Grell hired one of those new motor hansoms and gave the Kimball residence address he had gleaned from the street directory on the previous evening.

At the Kimball residence in the West Eighties a grave old butler told the caller that no further information was to be given to the press. Grell had noticed several bright-eyed young men grouped on the sidewalk when the horseless hansom deposited him at the curb. They were watching him now, although he was unaware of it. The butler, when assured that this particular young man was not another reporter, but a person claiming to be a friend of Miss Kimball, took his card. But he did not invite him in. Miss Kimball could not be seen.

"I think perhaps she may have a message for me."

But the butler had his orders from Dr. Gregg—and said so. Perhaps later . . .

Grell, running the gauntlet of reporters, who wished to know his name and whether there was any truth in a rumour that Clavering Kimball had "committed suicide on account of financial troubles," escaped on a southbound Madison Avenue street car and returned to his hotel. He tried to eat some breakfast, but without much success. He was beside himself with a chivalrous desire to reach and comfort Frances. She needed him. Of this he felt sure. But short of assaulting the butler and crashing his way into that house of mourning . . .

And Frances Kimball was indeed in need of comfort. Late on the previous night she had returned to the home which had been her father's, and hers, to find a group of young men bunched in front of it. From these swiftly assembled press men she had gathered a first inkling of the tragedy within. She had escaped the reporters and passed through the door which the butler had opened as the cab drew up. In the hall she had been greeted by the kindly, but for the moment stern-faced, Dr. Gregg.

"I'd been rather expecting it for some little time, while hoping, of course . . ." said the family friend and physician a little later. "Heart, you know. It runs in the Kimballs. Has had several attacks in the past year. He didn't tell you? No, he wouldn't. You never noticed or suspected that things were not right?"

"Oh, I thought—yes—but that it was only——"

Sobs drowned the rest. Dr. Gregg was studying her keenly, almost critically.

"After your mother's death three years ago," he said quietly, "your father was a very lonely man, Frances—the more so because he hid the fact. Business troubles, too—a killing combination at his age, though God knows he might have been good for years yet. I'm not reproaching you, Frances—you've enough to bear. Your social charity work—admirable and all that. But I sometimes felt that you didn't realize he needed . . . However—I think you'd be the better for a slight opiate."

"Why didn't *you* tell me—before it was too late?" she wailed.

"I meant to—told him so. He positively forbade it. Your father was a proud man, Frances. An opiate . . ."

It had no effect upon her when given, although she pretended that it did have. Through the rest of that night she lay in darkness, staring at nothing but Frances Kimball, as she for the time being saw herself. The portrait's shifting background was momentarily that short journey from the apartments in East Twenty-eighth Street. In the cab she had felt that a tug of war was going on within her. Grell captaining one side for good; Bancroft, the other—for what? There was a vague intuition that Bancroft was playing with her, using her in some way. Why had he allowed her to meet anyone there?—and that impossible floor-walker person! Why had he wished her to help him to the extent of putting the young man at his ease? And what was the matter with Jim Bancroft when that

Hooker man's name came up again? What was behind it all?

But she had not thought of these trivial matters—matters which did not concern her, perhaps—after entering the hall behind which, in the library, the body of her father still lay. Now, through the dark hours moving toward dawn, she reviewed herself in her relation to that parent. He had always indulged her, and more than ever after her mother's death, when the daughter became all that Clavering Kimball had left of immediate human love. He had allowed her an indulgence of independence as well as money. But she had found little to interest her in the life of her own set. Social work first—among babies in an East Side day nursery. She had revolted against the young of her species. She loved children in the picturesque abstract rather than the squally concrete. Probation work had provided more of the spice of human drama—tragedy shot with comedy and a fascinating touch of the forbidden.

Probation work—the latchkey—and Bancroft. The last made an excellent and—so she had thought until to-night—altogether safe cavalier escort. She had met him a year previously. How the association began she often hardly remembered. Introduced by Magistrate Marlowe, with whom, and while, she was having luncheon during court recess. They had met frequently thereafter, acquaintance ripening to intimacy of a quality in which there was more of a mental than physical attraction. She suspected, wrongly, as it turned out, that perhaps Bancroft and her father were not unknown to each other, because, mentioning the

lawyer's name one day, Clavering Kimball had scowled and said:

"A dangerous man, my dear. The body of a lion and the soul of a sewer rat!"

It had been their only serious difference of opinion. Kimball admitted that he had never had personal business dealings with the man and confessed in the end that he based his unfavourable estimate on mere hearsay.

"But," he had added, "a surrogate judge does not say in the matter of a will filed for probate by your friend, 'In this case, Mr. Bancroft, it does not appear that your motives may be above suspicion,' and not have some strong conviction back of such frank expression of opinion."

It was after that, in a contrary spirit—perhaps the wish was father to the thought that her parent might be wrong—that she associated more frequently with J. Loudon Bancroft, who never suggested passing, nor was invited to cross, Clavering Kimball's threshold. These were the days of the latchkey, the theatre-goings and little suppers with the lawyer who never made any further advance than that sudden, "Why don't we marry, Frances?" and that almost laughing, comradely kiss in the cab.

Yet from the moment of that kiss things had gone all awry in the cosmos of Frances Kimball. Immediately afterward had come that question of her father's about her zeal for uplift-the-fallen work. "It can't be that you *like* it?" Then, next morning, Oren Grell—the same clean-skinned, refined youth from up-state whom she had noticed (with curious, unexplained in-

terest) at Henley's on the previous evening. Oren Grell. . . .

She saw that her charity work had been inspired by no real sympathy with the unfortunate, but by a selfish craving to taste the forbidden without actual participation. There must be something in her which was unnatural. Her own father had seen it and left her with those last words of his as a bitter legacy of which she could never be rid, unless . . .

She might devote the rest of her life to charity; do penance by serving that which she now abhorred. For she did hate it at this moment. She had only yielded for a short adolescent period to the fascination of that spicy human page for which she had throughout girlhood discovered a taste in yellow-bound books.

She hated it all, and herself, now, at this moment, while her father lay dead in the library and she was prostrate with grief and self-reproach. But when the first flood of grief should be past, when she should again see herself in a less morbid light, would the leopard's spots reappear? Could she be other than she was?—consistently and determinedly other than she was? She could trust Oren Grell, but could she trust *herself* in that trusting?

So the hours of self-appraisal and self-contemning passed to the dawn. Thereafter she wandered restlessly about the house, making only one ordeal visit to that darkened library. Dr. Gregg, speaking little, watched her covertly. The butler, long in the Kimball service, watched her with tears in his eyes—tears of sorrow for her, for his dead master and for himself; for wise old Owens suspected what the next few hours

would bring forth for the daughter of Clavering Kimball. And himself was too old to reshape his life with ease.

It was about ten o'clock in the forenoon when the late financier's attorney, Bronson Ely, appeared. After a brief and earnest conference with Dr. Gregg, who first protested, then listened, then shrugged unwilling acquiescence, the legal man sought out Frances and said:

"It has always seemed to me, Miss Kimball, that a thing hurts less when one has already been hurt as much as one has feeling for. Dr. Gregg half agrees with me."

"I, too, Mr. Ely," she said listlessly. "If there is anything more to come I might even find it diverting."

"Well——" Mr. Ely paused—"it is a particularly fortunate thing that you decided some time ago to make a niche for yourself in the world. Otherwise, with no special training, you might find yourself confronting a grave problem. The fact is——"

"The fact is," she echoed as he paused again. It was the devil of a thing to break to a woman brought up as she had been. She saved him from discharging the painful duty. "The fact is—my father died poor, didn't he? Penniless? The market—caught him?"

Mr. Ely nodded, looking at her well-shod feet. Her feet did not move. His eyes travelled up to her face. She was smiling—almost laughing—in a way that terrified him.

"Not even the house," she said.

"In the end, probably not even that," he mumbled.

"Poor old Owens. I'm sorry about him," she said

reflectively. "As for me—don't worry, Mr. Ely. It isn't your fault."

"Heaven forbid! I advised him against—— But I won't say that. We all make mistakes. The sounder the general judgment the bigger the mistake when it's made. And it was hard-headedness built up the fortune which the same hard-headedness destroyed in the end. You've got some of his grit, Miss Frances. You're a good loser."

"I hope so," she said, turning and going slowly upstairs to her room.

There she faced the same mirror which she had questioned three nights before. Much water had passed under the bridge since then. The niche of usefulness she had created for herself was probation work. Doubtless, through Magistrate Marlowe and others, it could be arranged to make the position a salaried one. But—did she like it well enough? It was either that way, or——

With a sudden shiver she turned to a little hooded telephone on an *escritoire*. She fumbled with the pages of a directory which had been tastefully rebound in leather. Presently she called a number.

There was some delay before the person for whom she inquired could be paged and brought to the telephone.

"Oren?" she said. "Yes—it is Frances. . . . My father—is dead. Will you come to me, please? The address is . . ." She gave what he already knew. "Come now—*now*, Oren. I need you, dear."

Chapter XIII

HOUSE OF TOO MUCH TROUBLE

GRELL saw his lady and remained with her late into the afternoon. She was a very different Frances Kimball. Against the background of tragedy she was even more appealing to his desire to serve her.

At first her manner puzzled him. It was listless, or cold—he could not decide which. But then she broke under the warmth of his love and sympathy. She clung to him while he poured out his love.

It was only when he asked her to marry him immediately, offering to take over her troubles as his and shield her from further contact with the harsh things of life, that the obstacle, real or imagined, returned as a shadow between her and her desire.

"What do you know about me, dear?" she asked. "Three days ago you did not dream of my existence?"

"I've always dreamed of your existence. I've known you since I was born."

In the end she was strong enough to send him away; not to return, nor communicate, until after her father's burial. She would send him word. He must be satisfied with that.

He was. He left treading on velvet, anxious to find the friend who had guided his path across that of the

woman he had sought for a thousand years or so; eager to confide in someone. And Dayton was the only man in the city with whom he had even a slight intimacy.

But Dayton was to be found neither at the House of the Two Green Eyes nor at the *Sentinel* offices, nor in his rooms a few blocks north and west. Grell did not see him again until late in the evening of that day.

That forenoon, Richard Dayton had visited Bancroft's offices and received, with other newspaper men, not so much the promised announcement of the discovery and identification of the Villiers heir as confirmation of the stories printed that morning in the *Sentinel* and the *Lark*.

Dayton first went to Heinemann's store to interview that Margaret O'Neill who was a notions-counter girl by day and apparently something else by night.

"Miss O'Neill?" said the head floorwalker with a lordly sniff. "She's quit—and a good riddance, too!"

Ten minutes later Richard Dayton dropped in at the House of the Two Green Eyes. He seldom saw it in broad daylight. It didn't seem the same place. Even dingier and less colourful. It needed the gas-light touch. He was lucky enough to find Sergeant M'Gonigle doing day shift at the desk. M'Gonigle remembered the O'Neill girl and was glad to hear she had been discharged in court.

"Had a hunch she was on the level," said the big-hearted Irish sergeant. "But what for ya wastin' sleep time on her now?"

"Same hunch you had, Sarge. Just want to know if we were both wrong," said Dayton.

"Lookin' her up—hey? Well, if she's square—an' I'm bettin' my stripes she is—you lay off her, sonny—hear? She was a nice kid, an'——"

"You get me wrong," said Dayton. "I'm a newspaper man, not a skirt collector. I need her address. You got it?"

M'Gonigle eyed the reporter—and was satisfied. He turned back the pages of the blotter to the Saturday night entries.

"She refused to give an address," said he presently. "Later I got a telephone number through Mrs. Beckwith. Forget what it was, but the girl's family lived near a 'Simpkins's drug store'—which shouldn't worry a good, nosey reporter like you."

Half an hour later Dayton emerged from Simpkin's drug store at a corner of the Hell's Kitchen section of the West Side. He approached the antiquated house with the dying elm fronting it on the sidewalk and passed through the rickety gate in the fence enclosing the grassless plot. If Margaret O'Neill were not at Heinemann's it was still early enough for her night-bird personality to be nesting. He wished to have another look at this girl, to hear her speak, to smash an interrogation point in his mind about her.

It was Margaret who opened the door. Her face had been happy, though tearful, when he last saw it. It was again tearful, but far from happy. The brown-lashed blue eyes that had reminded him of Irish wishing wells were now heavily shadowed with sorrow and their lids red from weeping. She was plainly further

upset when she recognized the caller, although for a second her eyes lighted and a wan smile flitted about her mouth.

"Oh—Mr. Dayton!"

"Miss O'Neill!" he laughed, with a slightly exaggerated bow.

Then they stood for a few moments in awkward silence.

"I came to see you—to ask you something," said he.

The girl, confused, distressed, was looking back over her right shoulder.

"It's—it's Mr. Dayton—the reporter who helped us," she said to someone standing in the shadows there.

Kate O'Neill came forward. She, too, was plainly flustered for the moment, and her face showed signs of a disturbance not at all of the moment. It was haggard and lined, and her eyes, too, were red from much weeping. There was a half-healed bruise on her brow.

"The house of too much trouble," Dayton decided.

"Will you—will you—step in?" said Mrs. O'Neill, fingers playing nervously with a soiled apron.

Margaret shot an alarmed, inquiring glance at her mother, but stood aside for Dayton to pass into the hall and to a shabby but clean parlour furnished with ill-matched pieces and some framed lithograph atrocities and family enlargements in crayon.

"We're glad to see you again," said Margaret, while her mother continued to finger her apron. The two women neither sat down nor offered the visitor a seat—forgot, doubtless.

"I'm glad you're glad," said Dayton, failing to add, "though you don't look it." "I only wished to ask

why you aren't working for Heinemann's any more."

Margaret and her mother visibly and simultaneously started, then looked one at the other as if seeking an appropriate answer to offer.

"I'm working on that Villiers case," Dayton explained, "A floorwalker at Heinemann's turns out to be heir to the old lady's fortune. I had an idea"—he was looking straight into Margaret's eyes—"that you might have some acquaintance with him and could tell me where I could locate him for an interview."

If ever two women appeared at their wit's end in a situation requiring immediate solution they were Kate and Margaret O'Neill. Flushing and paling succeeded each other in Margaret's face. The mother's eyes had narrowed like some dangerous human creature's at bay.

"She don't know any such man," said Kate O'Neill harshly.

"But you worked at Heinemann's—up to last evening," said Dayton to Margaret. "I just thought——"

"I'm not working there any more," said the girl in a forced, strained manner, "because—Mother needs me at home."

In a flash Dayton thought he saw and understood. A decent girl of no little attractiveness working at a notions counter and pestered by a floorwalker Lothario. The situation had become impossible, especially after what had happened to her Saturday night. Why she had consented to meet the man at all was, of course, something of a mystery. Perhaps she had yielded for her job's sake—the family needing that job's weekly envelope—and consented to go, say, to a

theatre with the floorwalker, and resented the upshot of that going—his advances, perhaps, or the atmosphere of that resort to which he had taken her afterward. That was probably it. Dayton more than ever suspected that Margaret O'Neill was a clean and lovely little Irish-American girl.

"Then you don't know where he lives, or anything about him?" he declared, more than asked.

"Except that he's no good!" rasped Kate O'Neill. "He's dirt!"

"I can believe it," said Dayton. "You seem to know that much, at least," he added, observing the warning Margaret flashed to her mother.

How they might have explained this he was not to learn just then. A startling apparition appeared in the parlour doorway, entering from the hall. It was Felix O'Neill, dressed only in his underwear, his face bloated and wild-eyed and his voice raised in a quavering, whisky-hoarse howl.

"An' now, b' Gawd! whaat's this? Ye strate-walkin' Jizzibil! An't it bad enough the sorra an' throuble y'ave made f'r yer faather an' mother widout bringin' yer lousy lovers into me house? You——"

As the horrible word fell like a lash upon his quivering daughter, the drunken teamster staggered forward with a fist clenched and raised to strike.

"Ee-easy, old man," said Dayton calmly, breaking the none too great force of the nerveless blow with his own forearm and then adroitly seizing O'Neill's wrist. The teamster, weak from liquor's aftermath, incoherently wept and raged in that restraining grip.

"*You*—*YOU*—git outa here, ye perfumed fairy!"

he screamed. "Git out! Lemme go—lemme go an' I'll smash ye like the dirty louse y'are!"

"Felix! Felix!" wailed Kate, while Margaret, pale as a dead woman, looked helplessly at Richard Dayton and barely whispered.

"Go—please go—*please!*"

"Yes, I'm going," said Dayton. "Sorry I came to make matters worse for you people."

Walking up the street, he asked himself why had he gone to that house of too much trouble? For once his news hunch had played him utterly false, led him into a situation which—tragic enough, God wot!—was so sordidly common as to be of no news value whatever.

Poor Kate O'Neill! Poor Felix, too! And Margaret? More than ever Richard Dayton was sure that she was a brave and admirable girl fighting an environment which was all against her chances of betterment. Small wonder if the white lights called—a little gaiety and forgetfulness, at any price.

Yet, late that evening, as he was returning to the House of the Two Green Eyes from some minor investigation which had been ordered over the telephone by the *Sentinel*, he was surprised, and disappointed, to see that O'Neill girl, flashily overdressed, passing from a motor hansom to the entrance of the Cairo—a resort second only to the Haymarket in malodorous reputation. She was hanging on the arm of H. Augustus Smythe Villiers, also overdressed in patently new clothes of the latest, smartest, and sportiest Broadway ready-made cut. And both of them—especially

the ex-floorwalker—had plainly been looking on the wine when it was bubbling.

Dayton did not follow them into that place where bright lights, one-step, and ragtime music, saccharine ballads and drinks (with short change, or none at all), covered the real business. What use? He was amused in a cynical way—and nauseated at the same time. All at once he realized the rottenness of it all, the putrid core of this Tenderloin's rosy apple. He hated it, despised it, this lively bailiwick which was his nightly assignment as a newspaper man. It was getting on his nerves, he discovered to his surprise. Hitherto he had believed himself able to practise that art about which he had told Grell: "There's an art in mixing with a thing without becoming part of it." Was he becoming part of it? Or, rather, had he come so near to being callous that it took the minor tragedy of a drunken father and a wayward daughter to touch him with even a slight ripple of realized revulsion. He found himself fervently hoping that the higher powers of the *Sentinel* would shortly take him out of it and put him on general work, which is one step nearer the goal of every ambitious reporter who has no literary complex—covering the state or national Capitol, or (that Ultima Thule achieved by a few) foreign correspondence.

But such plums would never fall to a reporter who was so blind that he could be deceived by a girl whose eyes just happened to look like wishing wells. He had thought himself too wise in the ways of Tenderloin life to put much faith in the virtue of any human thing that passed between the jaundiced green eyes of that

house in the side street to which he now continued his interrupted progress.

There he found Oren Grell patiently awaiting him—a gallant worshipper at the shrine of ideal womanhood, ready to pour his overflowing soul into the ears of the *Sentinel's* Tenderloin police reporter!

Chapter XIV

STEALTHY PULLS THE STRINGS

IN his mood of the moment Dayton was at first cynically amused. Then, carried away by the faith and enthusiasm of the Jonathan who had apparently elected him David, he found himself envying the other's priceless illusion concerning the goodness and purity of all womankind in the light of one, Frances Kimball.

Grell said he was going to marry her just as soon as she said the word, which was withheld temporarily out of respect to her late father. She was to make a sign when he might come for that word, probably in a day or two.

For a week thereafter Grell would sit half the night with Dayton in the House of the Two Green Eyes when the *Sentinel* man took up his regular salaried assignment at 7:30 P. M. The time-killing lover would even have abandoned his room-and-bath in the not inexpensive bachelor hotel and taken lodgings in Dayton's rooming house, but that he feared to detach himself from that hostelry which was his official telephone address. A dozen times a day and night he visited the desk of that hotel, received a room key from a pigeon-hole which failed to contain a telephone call slip. And

nine times out of twelve he returned the key without going to his room at all

As the days went by without a message from Frances Grell's patience gave place to a restiveness succeeded by a growing depression. Dayton was by this time bored by the sameness of subject in his Jonathan's discourses. At the same time he sympathized with the young man's depression, Grell concealing not its cause. In fact, he concealed nothing of his heart and mind from Dayton. That was the boring part. The reporter himself wondered at the lady's silence and began to be worried for Jonathan.

"If this darned idealist ever finds a flaw in his idol's make-up," he told himself, "he's the kind that'll go straight plumb to hell!"

At the end of the week, when Grell turned up at the *Sentinel* office one day about noon, his face telling the story of another receiving and returning of a room key, Dayton lost patience.

"What's the matter with you, Grell?" he asked irritably. "Why wander around like a lost pup in a department store? Why don't you go and *get* your answer? Call her up! She may have forgotten the name of your hotel and can't locate its 'phone number. Ask her how much longer you've got to hang fire, anyway."

It had never occurred to Grell to disobey his lady's injunction. But neither had the possibility entered his mind that Frances might have been trying for days, and failed, to locate him!

Five minutes later he tried to call the Kimball residence by telephone, Dayton recommending "Informa-

tion" for that unlisted semi-private number. "Information's" answer was, "That number discontinued."

"Maybe so and maybe not," was Dayton's comment on this. "We're often up against that in our game. Jump in a cab or a car and lay siege to the castle itself."

Later, a more than ever disconsolate lover returned to the *Sentinel* office, where Dayton was pounding out several columns for the Sunday Magazine Section.

"Something's wrong—seriously wrong," said Oren. "The Kimball house is empty with shutters closed and a 'For Sale' sign up."

"Well, if you had any sense you'd have found that out before this," said the practical reporter. "If it had been my immediate business I might have guessed at something like this without even going there. Incidentally"—making a note on a piece of copy paper—"much obliged to you. There's maybe a half column in that. Kimball, you see, didn't commit suicide because he was broke. Didn't commit suicide at all. But it was common rumour that he'd been hammered to pieces in the Street. It was the last straw that broke his back—and killed him. The estate went into receivership—and 'Kimball Mansion Up For Sale' isn't bad at all from a news standpoint. But where's Miss Kimball? I suppose that's about all that interests you."

"I don't know," said Grell dully. "I can't understand it—no message—gone away without letting me know . . ."

"You poor lost pup!" was on Dayton's tongue. But what he really said was: "Leave it to me. I'll have news for you while you wait."

The channels of ready information were not uncharted for this news gatherer. He simply called the *Sentinel's* Wall Street man, who in turn called somebody else, who supplied the name of Bronson Ely as the late Clavering Kimball's attorney. Dayton promptly got Mr. Ely on the wire and learned as much as Mr. Ely cared to divulge. He was not prepared to confirm or deny anything about Kimball's affairs, but the house was on the market, yes, naturally. It was hardly to be expected that a bereaved and lonely daughter would continue to occupy—even if she might—a place so large and fraught with tragic memories. And, yes, very true, unfortunately, the Kimball estate was being straightened out by an appointed receiver.

Where was Miss Kimball? She had not been around Jefferson Market Court since her father's death.

"Naturally she has not been there," said Mr. Ely. "Don't know her plans for the future in that respect. She didn't confide in me, except that she wished to get away for a bit, going into the country to visit some friends. A very good move on her part. Help her to get over things. No, I don't know her address, and, of course, wouldn't give it to the press if I did. You're welcome. Good-bye."

That was all. There was nothing Grell could do but await his lady's voluntary reappearance.

Dayton observed his Jonathan with regretful sympathy, but made no suggestions. Stealthy Hooker, abnormally bright-eyed, observed also, and considered a few matters, picking here and there from the pigeon-holes of his queer brain.

"What's the matter with Friend Grell?" he asked Dayton early one evening at the House. "Acts like some skirt has 'trun' him down, as the sayin' is."

"Does he?" asked Dayton coolly.

Stealthy grinned and picked around again among his pigeonholes.

"The Kimball dame, ain't it?" said Stealthy to the *Sentinel* man.

Dayton eyed him coldly. He was about to say something, but the nighthawk smiled his disarming smile and headed off something uncivil with the remark:

"Bettin' ten dollars he hears from her this evening."

Dayton's hostile stare changed to one of inquiry. It would be worth ten dollars, to Grell, at least, if it should transpire that the Rounder was betting on a sure thing. Hooker seldom made a wager on anything but inside information. If he were for once merely gambling, Dayton would be just ten dollars ahead.

"Say before to-morrow evening," amended Stealthy. "She might have another engagement to-night."

"Welching?"

"No—sir! On the contrary, ten, if before midnight to-night—fifteen, if before six to-morrow evening. Even money."

"You're on," said Dayton.

Shortly thereafter, in the corner drug store, Stealthy Hooker looked up and called the telephone number of a certain apartment house in East Twenty-eighth Street. He asked for "Miss Forrest," and thought he recognized the voice of a woman who answered rather tentatively. He did not announce himself as the only

man likely to call her at that place—J. Loudon Bancroft. He did not give his name at all.

"Miss Kimball—I mean, Miss Forrest," he said quietly. "Better call up your friend, Mr. Grell, if you want to save him from a drunken grave."

There was silence.

"Who is speaking? Mr. Dayton?"

"No, this isn't Mr. Dayton."

Silence again. Then—"I didn't catch the name. Is it—perhaps Mr. Villiers?"

Stealthy raised his eyebrows and chuckled. So the ex-floorwalker millionaire now had the entrée!

"'S all right, Miss Kim—Forrest—just a friend of Mr. Grell's who maybe knows through Mr. Bancroft where you are, which Grell doesn't. He don't know I'm calling you, either. But you better get in touch with him right away. Try Gramercy . . ." He gave a number which was that of the Combine telephone of the shack dwellers.

Before the *Lark's* nighthawk got back to the House, Deeming of the *Clarion* stuck his head in at the station-house door and said to a temporarily quite sober Grell, who had just previously entered and was listening to a belated homily from his David.

"You're wanted on the 'phone in the Shack."

Grell hastened across the street, returning in two minutes with his face alight.

"Dickie, old man!" he whispered. "It's Frances! She's back! I'm to meet her at Morelli's spaghetti house as soon as I—and she—can get there."

He was gone before Dayton could recover from surprise. And he was no sooner gone than Stealthy

Hooker drifted in, smiling blandly, and smoking one of his ready-made cigarettes. The *Sentinel* man took a ten-dollar note from his bill fold and silently passed it over.

"You win! But how did you work it?"

"Now you're asking questions," grinned the Rounder, "which is all contrary to Combine versus Cutthroat rules. Have a cigarette?"

It was the packet of ready-mades Hooker offered—perhaps by accident, for he made as if to withdraw it, saying quickly, "Maybe you'd rather have the makin's." But Dayton had already extracted a cigarette with the remark that they were all alike to him.

Two minutes later he had altered his opinion about that all-alikeness. There was a sweet, mouth-drying flavor to the cigarette which offended his taste first and his head presently.

"For Heaven's sake, change your brand, Hooker!" he exclaimed, pitching the partly smoked cigarette at the stove. "Tastes like doctored rope."

"I know it," said the Rounder with a queer smile. "I got a depraved taste. I like 'em—like some folks prefer unsurpassed chicory to real coffee. My mistake. Don't usually offer 'em to my friends. Try the makin's."

But Dayton declined. He had an oncoming headache which, at its worst an hour later, confirmed a suspicion about Stealthy Hooker and his ready-made cigarettes.

"Doped!" he muttered. "Gets his little shot that way! 'Mistake,' says he. Sure it was a mistake. *Must* ha' been!"

Chapter XV

A WOMAN DECIDES

IT was about five hours later when Grell reëntered the House of the Two Green Eyes, where the Sphinx, Hooker, Dayton, and such other members of the Combine as were not playing poker in the shack across the street were yawning and glancing occasionally at the clock. At 3 A. M. they would call it a night, the last morning editions having been put to bed.

At a glance Dayton observed that Grell was not surrounded by the aura of a happy lover. He was grave, even heavily introspective, and smoked many cigarettes, tossing them away only half-consumed. Perhaps he was conscious of the regard of Dayton and the abnormally curious stare of Stealthy Hooker.

At three o'clock the bunch went home. Dayton, following his usual custom, walked up the Rialto toward his rooms, via the Sentinel Building where he invariably stopped to get a copy of the last edition. Grell walked with him in more or less silence and did not turn off at the corner nearest his bachelor hotel. After Dayton emerged from the *Sentinel* offices with a damp newspaper Grell said:

"I'll walk with you to your rooms, if you don't mind. I've got something to tell you."

"Of course. Well, let 'er go," said Dayton, who valued sleep, when he could get it.

"Everything's all right," said Grell in a voice that belied the statement. "I'm saying good-bye to you to-night. You know how I appreciate your friendship and help and all it brought me."

"Meaning, I suppose——? Well, I hope you won't come after me with a gun a year from now!"

"A year from now?" echoed Grell in a startled way. "Why a year from now?" Getting no answer, he went on: "It's all settled. We'll be married day after to-morrow, probably. But not here. Her father's recent death, you know. In Maine, I understand, transients don't have to wait several days between getting the license and marrying."

"Why Maine? What's the matter with our Gretna safety valve—Greenwich, Connecticut?"

"Oh, well, that isn't the principal difficulty, really. It's—with all respect to your profession, Dayton—the newspapers. Frances doesn't want it known for a while—so soon after her father—you understand! I'm to meet her in Boston to-morrow evening. We'll get a steamer out of there as soon as possible after we're married—right away, if we're in luck. Don't think our marriage would attract notice in Boston—or Portland, say—do you?"

"Not unless you tell it all to a newspaper man, as you're doing now!" laughed Dayton.

"Lord! *You* wouldn't make an item of it?"

"No. You tie my hands. But what's the matter? Hangover? You fail to act like a prospective bridegroom."

"Oh, I'm happy enough—can't quite realize it—that's all.

Oddly enough, despite that it was to be David and Jonathan's last evening together for some time, perhaps, Grell did not accept the other's invitation to ascend to his rooms for further talk.

"No," said he. "You've got to sleep, and so have I. Making an early start for Boston, and I've got to pack." He held out his hand after an awkward silence. "Until I—we—get back. I'm your friend for life, Dickie Dayton, understand?"

"Glad if you think I've done anything," said Dayton with some embarrassment and much uneasiness.

Grell had not lied. But he had not told all the truth. And all that he had conveyed was not exactly true, although Frances herself was as responsible as he for any slight prevarication. The truth, as Grell knew it, was this:

He met Frances Kimball at Morelli's Italian restaurant. In his joy at seeing her he failed to note much amiss, attributing her pallor and strainedness to the sorrow she had been passing through. The restaurant was more than half deserted, the hour being between dinner time and theatres-out. But, even so, they instinctively chose a secluded corner-table.

Neither indulged much in the thick Italian soup, the heavy spaghetti, and the rest of the meal. But the red wine, which in those days was included in a meal for sixty cents, and an Italian tenor's warblings about "Santa Lucia" and "Mama Mia" conjured an atmos-

phere suggesting sunny bays, blue skies, a smoking volcano, Sorrentine villas, and Roman ruins.

"We'll browse through Pompeii together," whispered the lover. "And the Blue Grotto at Capri. Always wanted to satisfy myself it's all it's cracked up to be. Probably is, if the woman you love is trailing a little white hand in the phosphorescent water."

"Don't! Don't!" was her whispered cry. "It can't be. Don't you understand? It wouldn't be fair to marry you—now; at least—not for some time. I've got to think."

"Haven't you been thinking of nothing else for two weeks?" he protested. "You admit that you had to call me, just had to."

"I know. But—listen, dear! I want you to go to Europe as you planned. When you come back, if you still love me, perhaps then, I might——"

"You mean that, even after such obedience, you still only *might*?"

"Please," she pleaded. "I've been so miserable. Let this evening be only of happy things—like that day at Fort Lee."

"Suits me!" said Grell, with a smile. "If you'll *let* it be like that day. We'll go to Central Park—after we leave here."

"Oh, I didn't mean——" She felt herself slipping, the thrall again beginning to drug her to nonresistance. She was spared explaining just what she did mean by the four-piece orchestra and the tenor bursting out *fortissimo* in the refrain of "Funiculi."

The remainder of the dinner passed pleasantly—so pleasantly that, warmed with wine and renewed in-

timacy, when they later descended from a street car at the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to Central Park they were again as two immortals about to wander in Elysian Fields.

The climax came when they sat on a bench by the side of a little lake shot with comets of light reflected from the million illuminations spangling the vast surrounding quadrangle of the city.

"I can't let you go!" he said huskily. "I can't go without you! You've got to marry me—to-night or to-morrow—as soon as it can be done. Then we'll go away together, away from all that's been weighing you down—personal trouble and sorrow. Just look ahead a little, beloved; Paris, then Italy, together, though 'wilderness were Paradise enow,' so long as you're there. Say 'yes,' Frances, just say the magic password to your happiness and mine!"

"O-o-oh!" she cried. It was as the soft, low moan of a lost soul barred out after one glimpse of heaven beyond the gate. "I can't, I can't, because——"

"Because what? Why? Why can't you?" he urged.

The words fell from her lips like dark stones dropped into a darker pool:

"I'm not—what you think me—Oren. I've been—a fool. I regret it—oh, bitterly! But the fact—remains. I'm not fit"—again that soft, low moan—"not fit to be your wife."

The idealist that was Oren Grell found himself unable to articulate the "My God!" which his tongue involuntarily tried to utter. After a long and terrible silence his voice came in a whisper.

"Frances—what are you—saying?"

"All I need say," she replied, except—go to Europe—anywhere—and forget me."

"Is it—was it—there is—somebody else?" he managed to say at last.

"No—and yes. Don't ask me to explain, please. Don't make it harder for us both. It is not what you perhaps think. Just that there's something in me—a—a streak—call it what you like. It terrifies me—like that day in the woods—this obsession for you. I dare not trust myself. Don't you see? I want to be fair—to you. I love you so that I would die rather than have you learn to think of me as—as I sometimes think of myself."

All at once Grell's arms were about her tightly and he silenced her with his lips upon her mouth.

"You're morbid—that's all!"

"You will marry me?" he repeated.

"No."

"Then you are sending me away," he said, as stupefied as a man whose head has encountered an obstacle he thought had been removed.

"No."

"What am I to understand? You won't marry me and you are not sending me away, either?"

"You will perhaps think less of me—" her speech came in jerky fashion—"when I—say it. I mean—you can take me with you if you wish. I have nowhere else to go, and I want to be with you. If, a year from now, when your love is a more normal temperature, let's say—if you can still say that you wish to marry

me—yes, Oren, I'll marry you then—knowing I'm really necessary to your happiness."

"My God!" This time he managed to mumble an actual appeal for divine help at a moment when he was called upon to make a decision involving less his own desire than their love and ultimate mutual respect.

On the following morning, while Richard Dayton still slept like a night-toiling newspaper man, Oren Grell left New York for Boston. In the South Station of the latter city he greeted Frances Kimball when she arrived by a much later train.

Four days later a "Mr. and Mrs. Oren Greville" were listed among the passengers picked up in Boston Harbor by a steamship bound for London, via Cherbourg.

The day after, Dayton received a letter from Grell, mailed just before sailing, in which the happy consummation of a love affair was reported. The *Sentinel* reporter, his instinct for fact still in a curious state of discomfoting interrogation, read and reread that letter, which was but a scrap—a hurried, brief statement such as might be sent by telegraph in an effort to keep within the ten-word limit.

That same day Mr. Bancroft had received a letter from a lady. The fact that the lady did not sign herself "Frances Kimball" or "Frances Some-Other-Name" did not alleviate the pain this communication brought to J. Loudon in the downtown office to which the envelope was addressed.

The contents annoyed him excessively. He was more upset even than he had appeared that evening

when Smythe Villiers told of paying fifty dollars hush money to one Melville Hooker. His nerves, Bancroft realized, were not what they used to be. He was the more irritated because during the past two weeks matters had been progressing very smoothly—for him. The will would presently receive probate; for Mrs. Villiers *had* left a will—of a sort. It had been found in a writing desk in her late home in Washington Square. Investigating detectives had been there when Bancroft discovered it. Which was fortunate. Also, any suspicion that the heir apparent might have had anything to do with his mother's tragic death had been dropped—dismissed almost at once by the authorities. The latter were still at sea, however, in the matter of the mystery's solution. And already, upon Bancroft's generous advances, the heir to the dead woman's money was behaving around Broadway in the manner in which an heir of his type might be expected to behave.

The lawyer had been quite sorry to hear of Clavering Kimball's death, for Frances's sake. At the earliest moment he had arranged a meeting and assured her of his unabating sympathy. He had come very near asking her again to marry him—but had not done so. It would have been unfair to her to take such advantage of her momentary helpless situation. She was well-nigh penniless, he had gathered. He himself was by no means a well-to-do man. In fact, there were certain judgments, amounting to \$25,000, standing against him at this moment, besides a little old matter of \$200,000 which had caused him virtual exile until a merciful statute of limitations had oper-

ated. No, it would not have been fair to her. He could not have supported her in the luxury to which she had been accustomed.

But what use in wasting thought on that now? This letter, from Boston. It was rank ingratitude—underhand ingratitude, at that! And after, too, he had allowed her the exclusive use of the Twenty-eighth Street apartments when she had said she wished to be alone with herself for a time! For two weeks he had most meticulously kept away from the apartments himself. He had had that much consideration for her and the conventions. He had not even called her on the telephone until the previous evening. Then, wishing to suggest that a change of atmosphere—say, at the Little Hungary Restaurant on the East Side—would do her good, he had learned from the Negro boy that “Miss Forrest” had been gone several days—and had taken all her “things” when she left!

If he had not been so chivalrously considerate in refraining from visiting the apartments after turning them over to her and telling the Negro that “Miss Forrest” would occupy them exclusively for a time, he might have got wind of this thing in time and stopped it. He was quite sure he could have stopped it.

He threw the letter on the table with a muttering which ended in a single profane outburst.

“Damnation!”

He would have to fall back, after all, upon his original thought to conserve that one-million-dollar fortune by somehow disciplining the heir. For his more recent idea, which called for the tender participation of Frances Kimball, had been utterly ruined by that

lady herself. She had, he gathered that much from this extraordinary letter, gone off to Europe with a *husband!*

Concerning his own sensations about being deprived of the companionship of one "whose marriage to anyone else would awake him to a realization that he had lost her"—oddly enough, to that phase of the matter he never gave a thought.

Chapter XVI

BETWEEN THE ACTS—VARIETY!

So far as Richard Dayton was concerned the incidents connected with Oren Grell's "Seeing New York" period were at an end. After that one brief note from Boston the reporter did not even receive from his late Jonathan a picture postcard of the Tower of London, or as much as a scribbled "Leaving to-morrow for——"

Affairs in the House of the Two Green Eyes went on as usual; some nights exciting, others as unexciting as if the Tenderloin's harvest home of trouble were merely a police station in Goatville. Broadway's nocturnal show, continuing under a blaze of steady white lights and cavorting coloured ones, contributed its usual quota to the more sinister reflection of green lights in the dingy side street.

Once or twice Dayton saw the O'Neill girl in or around the Great White Way, usually with the heir to the Villiers fortune. They were doing the pace, clearly, for the ex-floorwalker either had received his money or its present receipt was assured. The will of the so-called Mrs. Villiers had been admitted to probate. It was not a regular will, but in conjunction with other evidence it was held valid. It contained at least one surprise, which not only provided a new lead in the

seemingly perennial Villiers story but caused the name of young "Smythe Villiers" to be transposed to "Villiers Smythe."

Bancroft had produced record of the marriage on September 17, 1883, of one Augustus Archer-Smythe, a supposed retired Captain of the British army, to Belle Tremaine, although the latter had been known for some time before 1883 and during the last years of her life as Mrs. Belle Tremaine Villiers. The fact that the birth registry of a son named Henry Augustus Villiers Smythe, and born of that marriage, showed that he had been born three months after the recorded marriage, suggested, aside from the legal legitimacy of the child, that the lawyer was being quite frank about things. The father, Captain Archer-Smythe, had disappeared several months after the child's birth—another painful admission in a case which could not, and did not, escape newspaper attention. As to the name Villiers, it was impossible to establish who the "Mr. Villiers" was from whom she might have "acquired" that name before her marriage to Archer-Smythe. There was no record of her ever having married a Villiers, or any man other than the father of H. Augustus. Mr. Bancroft, with a quite commendable desire for clarity, frankly stated that he did not believe any such person had ever existed and that the woman had merely adopted a matronly title as a measure of self-protection against gossip. It was conceded that her conduct at various stages of a checkered career had been food for gossip. Anyway, there was no record of any previous marriage and no evidence that any "Mr. Villiers" had played any important part in the woman's affairs.

The heir, whose real name now appeared to be Henry Augustus Villiers Smythe, did not remember his father, of course. But he painfully recalled his mother, satisfying the surrogate on this point with details of her life and habits in the house in Washington Square. No witnesses produced could positively swear that Captain Archer-Smythe was the boy's father, although they did recall a military-appearing person who frequented, over a period of two or three years, the ménage of Belle Tremaine, or Mrs. Villiers, or Smythe-Villiers, or Villiers-Smythe—whatever she called herself. These witnesses were neighbours at the time: Washington Square residents who, refusing to have any social intercourse with the woman, nevertheless had taken sharp notice of visible doings in and about the place. There were other male visitors. It was said that she mixed in politics a great deal. But it was generally understood that the military-appearing person was the husband. Yes, they had seen the boy playing about the square at times and were reasonably sure that he was one and the same with the claimant. The photo of young Villiers Smythe at fifteen helped to this identification.

No witnesses at all were produced who had been among those "other male visitors" of the period under examination—perhaps because none survived after twenty years, or because none was anxious to come forward and court the publicity likely to attend connection with a case having a murder shadowing its immediate foreground. Also, there might be a dozen other reasons. Nevertheless, there were several witnesses—and they appeared glad when their questioning was

over—who testified of a period perhaps ten years or fifteen years later. They admitted having been not infrequent visitors at the house of the queen-playing mother of the claimant. The latter some of them now recognized (and from that photo at fifteen) because of an embarrassing incident of a mother's display of temper in ordering a boy out of a drawing room into which he walked one day in the middle of one of her "royal" receptions. Up to that time, the witnesses stated, while they had known the lady had had a husband—Villiers, or Smythe, or Smythe-Villiers or Villiers-Smythe—it did not interest them, to whom she was just "dear Mrs. Villiers"—they had not known until this incident that she had a son fifteen years old. Her rage at the time had secretly amused her "courtiers," who knew (as Mr. Bancroft suggested, and the surrogate nodded his understanding of the matter) that this was a phase of the eccentric woman's insane vanity.

In short, there was no great difficulty about getting the will through. The will itself, in the form of a letter in Mrs. Villiers's handwriting (proved so by comparisons) addressed to her lawyer, J. Loudon Bancroft, had been found in an *escritoire* in her regal boudoir. Detectives testified to having been present when it was taken from the desk. They had been with the lawyer—or he had been with them—during a house search which might have led to some clue to a solution of the murder end of the case. They identified the letter-will in which, as read in court, Mrs. Villiers (so-called for convenience) had appointed her man of affairs executor in case of her death—she had

a not uncommon aversion to the subject of death and the making of a regular will—and had directed that whatever property of hers remained after all just debts had been settled “be turned over to my only and legitimate son, Henry, whose present whereabouts I do not know.” The letter ended with an injunction that her lawyer take all steps to find this son, “to whom, perhaps, I was unnecessarily harsh at times—because, somehow, I never could bear to have children around me.”

Three months passed, each day and each night bringing new and fresh interests in a lively and wide-open city; so that the affair of Grell and Frances Kimball was becoming but a dim incident of past history in the memory of Richard Dayton.

The girl with the eyes like Irish wishing wells he had long since dismissed, or tried to dismiss, as a mere slip in judgment on his part. Nevertheless, she quite frequently reappeared to remind him of his error in estimate. It was not only that he saw her occasionally in the midnight company of a more or less inebriated ex-floorwalker—who now sported an opera cape and a crush hat—but once she came near to being arrested with Villiers Smythe over a wine-throwing fracas in Rector’s. They were saved only by George Rector’s diplomacy and George Rector’s gracious invitation *not* to drop in again next time they were *passing* his place.

The heir himself came under the eyes of the green lamps once. But he was little inconvenienced. He merely deposited cash bail, resumed his night’s revel course, and paid a fine next morning in Jefferson Mar-

ket Court, after it was shown that the complainant was satisfied to have received compensation for material damages done. It was a small matter of H. Augustus having personally driven a motor hansom through a florist's plate-glass window so that he might leave, personally, an order for three dozen American Beauty roses to be sent to Miss Dolly Carnation of the Frivolities.

And once, to Dayton's disgust and somewhat to his surprise, the girl who was Dolly Carnation by night and Margaret O'Neill when she was at home, was brought into the House by her old Nemeses, Bisco and Drane, on the old familiar charge. The girl saw Dayton in the alcove corner with other reporters and instantly averted her eyes from his. She was again locked in a cell for the night, and she was fined five dollars in the morning at Jefferson Market Police Court. Had Magistrate Marlowe been sitting instead of Magistrate Corning (who had never seen her before) the penalty might have been a more or less protracted stay on Blackwell's Island without the option of a fine.

She paid the five dollars and presumably went back to business. That was all Dayton learned or wished to learn. He refused to be further interested, and snarled when Hooker of the *Lark* and Deeming of the *Clarion* said: "Satisfied now, Dickie?" It puzzled the *Sentinel* man, however, that a girl who was a friend of a millionaire Broadway rounder should be arrested as a common woman of the streets and spend a night in a cell for lack of a bail bondsman. But perhaps she

had had a temporary falling-out with her "check book" and was short of ready money.

On another night, a Saturday night, there was a very profane and noisy Irishman brought in and "booked" for the night on a charge of being drunk and disorderly. He gave his name as Felix O'Neill, adding with a quite unnecessary howl, "an' be damned t' yez, *all av yez*!"

During the transit of Felix through the booking office, Dayton kept his hat well down over his eyes. He did not care to risk recognition and renewed charges of being a home breaker.

The Villiers murder mystery was by now in a state of anabiosis. That is to say, its state of insolubility left it a seeming dead thing which could yet return to life, like a fish frozen in a block of ice. As the matter stood—or quiescently lay—an old woman with one foot already in the grave had been strangled to death in a park by some thug who, before he could rob the bejewelled body, had been scared off by an approaching policeman.

So the police left it at that, unable to do any better or worse. There were crime cases coming up every day to cover failure in a particular one. For in those days the crime upon which the police worked hardest was the one with the highest probability of success and the right sort of attendant publicity for New York's "Finest." When a mystery proved too much for the mentality of promoted pavement pounders their maxim was, "Forget it, if the newspapers do."

But the Villiers murder mystery—perhaps the spotlight-loving spirit of the eccentric old lady herself—refused to be shelved for longer than three months.

At the end of this period between the acts, Mrs. Villiers figuratively stalked into the limelight again—and from a most unexpected left-rear entrance of the stage.

Chapter XVII

PLAYING WITH DYNAMITE

It was a dull afternoon in the *Sentinel* offices. There was a dearth of happenings to provide employment for a dozen or more reporters who were idling about the great city room.

"Dayton!" called the city editor, hooking a receiver on a telephone.

Dayton jumped to the call. It meant an afternoon assignment on space at seven dollars a column.

"Hop down to the Hotel de Ville," said the city editor. "Old Louis H. Villiers, who's run that joint since the Rialto moved up from Fourteenth, has just 'phoned in that he wants to talk to 'a nice, intelligent reporter from the *Sentinel*.' Do you qualify?"

"I can throw a bluff."

"You'll have to. See what's eatin' the old horse. Probably wants it written up that he's changing the Broadway front of his hotel and thinks it's worth our front page with a cut of his made-over Home for Ham Actors."

At the Hotel de Ville, a few blocks south of the Sentinel Building, Dayton was ushered into a dingy room opening in from behind the clerk's desk. The Hotel de Ville, much favoured by the theatrical profession, was the sort of building relic about due for

much publicity in a "death-trap" fire followed by an investigation and further fire ordinances.

Before the reporter's eye became accustomed to the semidarkness of a cubbyhole office room lighted only from a transom and an airshaft skylight, a doddering old man got out of a chair before a littered desk and locked the door on the inside.

"I don't want anyone to come in here while I'm talking to you," said Louis Villiers in a voice that had a senile note.

He was, indeed, quite an old man. Also, he was plainly in ill health. His eyes were staring. There were bluish sacks under them. The rest of his face was of a pasty hue. His under lip seemed to work itself loose at intervals, and his mouth corners moistened so that frequently he had to apply a handkerchief.

"You're very young," said he, after doubtfully staring at Richard Dayton. "Very young. But—of course. The *Sentinel* is a great paper. You wouldn't be on it, they wouldn't send you to see me, if—if you weren't intelligent—able and intelligent."

"I try to hold my job down," said Dayton, smiling. Judging the direct method best in this case, he asked, "What's on your mind, Mr. Villiers? The city editor said you had something to give us."

"I have," said old Louis solemnly, very solemnly. "Something that is going to surprise a lot of people, something I gave much thought to before I decided to call up the *Sentinel*. I *did* think of giving it to young Hooker. You know him?—on the *Lark*. I've given him lots of stories, helped him along. Nice, clever lad, Melville is. Always liked him—but I don't

like his paper. The *Sentinel*, now, is a great and dignified journal. I have read it for over thirty years, and—and——”

“And after thirty years you’re going to hand us a big story, eh?” laughed Dayton.

“Not a big story, not exactly big, but very important—to me, at least.”

Dayton’s hope of much space diminished. The story of importance to the man who gives it is often—quite usually—without a particle of importance to anyone else. But there are times . . . This was one of them. Louis Villiers was the man who hadn’t the smallest idea of the explosive quality of the item he was about to hand over. His only thought was that it was “very important” to him.

“Young man—Mr. Dayton, isn’t it? Well, Mr. Dayton, did you—do you happen to remember a woman calling herself Mrs. Villiers who was found murdered on a Washington Square Park bench some four or five months ago?”

“Yes,” said Dayton evenly, while his heart action accelerated. It suddenly came to him that this old man’s name . . . Of course, there were many persons named Villiers, but what was coming? . . . It came.

“Well, young man—Mr. Dayton—I wish to state—and I wish you to print it in the *Sentinel* that—that woman was *not* my wife!”

Schooled as Richard Dayton was never to betray that he was startled by any revelation making for news, for once he was dumfounded—and showed it. That murdered woman was *not* this doddering old man’s wife? Who on earth had ever said she was—

or had been? No one had ever suspected, even, that because the owner of the Hotel de Ville was named Villiers he was even remotely connected with the Mrs. Villiers who had been strangled in a park!

There was absolute silence for a few moments. Old Villiers was nodding his head, either involuntarily or to emphasize his unexpected statement. In Dayton's mind was a confusion of conjectures, attempts at swift reconstruction of a number of known facts, and, mainly, a great question as to why this man was making this announcement. Was he, perhaps, not quite mentally balanced—suffering from some senile delusion brought on by too much reading about a murdered woman by the name of *Villiers*?

Dayton was a capable news gleaner. In this moment he quickly decided that he would gain nothing by pretending that he understood. He would profit more by being frank.

"Why do you say that Mrs. Villiers was not your wife?" he quietly asked. "Except for your denial of it nobody would ever have been likely to suspect that she might have been."

"Ah?" said old Louis with a pathetically cunning look. "That's what you think. But you're young—very young. It has already been stated that she and I were married."

"When? And who made the statement?" asked Dayton, suddenly perceiving a possible complete re-writing of the story of the Villiers case—even, perhaps, a solution of the mystery surrounding the woman's murder.

"When?" echoed the old man, still with that pitiable

look of vast shrewdness. "The statement was made on the morning of June 2, 1883, over twenty years ago. And it was made in cold print in the 'Marriage Column' of the very paper you work for, young man, the New York *Sentinel*."

"Yet you say that she was not your wife?"

"She was not. I have been married only once, and my poor, dear wife is upstairs at this blessed moment. It is in justice to her——"

"But, hold on, Mr. Villiers!" Dayton interrupted, as a good reporter never should. "You may do your wife a greater injustice by starting a question nobody else has ever raised, or was likely to—the question whether your wife is legally that, if it should be said that perhaps you *were* married at one time to the woman who was murdered in the park and there is no record that you ever divorced her."

"I'm telling you," the old man repeated with a dull patience, "I was *never* married to that woman. So why should I get a divorce from her?"

Dayton studied his man. Louis H. Villiers was clearly weak of mind as well as body. Perhaps the old man did not realize what he was precipitating; was moved to this seemingly unprovoked and dangerous statement by some queer impulse of a senile brain. The reporter pitied him in this moment. Out of that pity he did something which is to his credit as a gentleman if not as a hardened news gatherer.

"Mr. Villiers," said he, "are you aware that in making this statement you invite not only a great deal of unpleasant publicity but an inquisition by the police? They are still casting around for someone who might

have benefited by the exit of Mrs. Belle Villiers—so-called. Anyway—I can't, and don't, mean to rush into print with a story like that. Any man by the name of Villiers could get up and say 'She was not *my* wife!' and the public would just say he was either crazy or looking for free advertising—say, for the Hotel de Ville."

"The Hotel de Ville is going out of business, sir," said the old man with a touch of dignity. "I am getting on in years. I only do this for the sake of my poor, dear wife who is upstairs at this blessed moment."

Dayton was conscious of a slight headache, as if he had struck his head recently against some hard obstruction. But dimly he perceived that possibly the poor, dear wife upstairs might have something to do with this extraordinary move on the part of her doddering husband. She might have nagged him into it; or it was the kind of wild toss of the ball a woman of the illogical sort might make.

"Does Mrs. Villiers, your wife, know you are doing this?" inquired the reporter.

"No, no," said Louis hastily. "Dear me, no! She does not know what I have planned."

"She may know to-morrow."

"Ah, but then, I shall have done my duty—and justice to her."

Dayton figuratively threw up his hands. "Mr. Villiers, you'll have to explain."

"I will," said the old man, who seemed to be deriving a certain amount of pleasure from his method of holding dramatic suspense—and a yellowed paper,

which his half-palsied hands had taken from a desk drawer.

"I will. Now, listen carefully, young man—Mr. Dayton. Before you were born, perhaps—about 1880—I knew this woman, Belle Tremaine. That was her name then. She was very well known. She was not—what some would call—a good woman. I do not mean—well, she liked adulation and was very beautiful, very, very beautiful. Men crowded about her. Even before that, in the late 'sixties, Boss Tweed himself, and his Ring . . . But that was all in the papers. Anyway—I knew her. In fact, I'll admit I was for a time as much in love with her as the rest of them. She was very beautiful—then. But that was all. I—I married my poor, dear wife, who is upstairs at this blessed moment, in 1883, August 12, 1883. It was a quiet wedding, very quiet. I did not even put it in the papers. For one thing, I wished to avoid—talk."

Louis Villiers's face clouded and he fell into a musing about something perhaps a generation back. Dayton kept silent awhile. Then—

"You didn't announce it in the papers because it might have aroused talk, that you were supposed to have married Belle Tremaine a short time before your—next marriage?"

"I tell you I *didn't* marry Belle Tremaine!" Louis Villiers reasserted, this time with impatience. "That young man who has come into her money isn't my son at all!"

"Who ever said——?" was on Dayton's tongue. But the old man was talking on.

"Not my son. His name is Smythe, like the papers

say. The Villiers part of his name—he has no right to it. That was a trick of hers to make it seem she had been married before. She had called herself Mrs. Villiers before that; but she had no right to.”

“Why not? Why did she use that name, then and afterward, if she had no right to it?”

“She gave her real name as ‘Belle Tremaine’ when she got married to Captain Smythe, didn’t she?” said the senile Louis Villiers triumphantly.

“Yes. That came out in the will hearing.”

“But you’ll find out that she and Smythe didn’t put any notice of *their* marriage in the papers, either!” Again his face had that pathetic expression of a point triumphantly scored. “You smart newspaper men overlooked that recorded entry of a Smythe-Tremaine marriage, just as you missed that *Sentinel* notice of a supposed marriage between me and the same woman shortly before that.”

“That’s over twenty years ago,” said Dayton. “The news-gathering system wasn’t so well organized. Or there may have been a big story broke loose to crowd out smaller things.”

“Maybe—and a lucky thing for me,” said Louis, bobbing his head. “Somebody might have said: ‘But wasn’t it in the papers the other day that she married Louis Villiers? How’s this?’

“Well, *this* is how it was, young man—Mr. Dayton. I don’t know just how you can print it—but you can—if you know how to convey a thing without actually stating it. This Captain Archer-Smythe was her latest lover. She didn’t want a husband—never did—

but it looked then as if she ought to have one. She put that notice in the *Sentinel*, June 2, 1883, that she and I had been married on such and such a date. She thought me easy. She had been calling herself 'Mrs. Villiers' before that for several years. Some of my friends, who saw that notice, came to me. I said it was false—a joke—and one I did not like. For at that time I was engaged to marry my poor, dear Mary who is upstairs at this blessed moment. Perhaps Belle—that woman—thought I would come and see her about it and I would agree—just to help her out, you see, for old friendship's sake. I'd always been easy. But I didn't. That was asking too much. I sent word to her to come see me here, at this hotel which I had just built. And in this very room I made her sign a paper in which she said we were not married and the marriage notice in the *Sentinel* was false."

Dayton's eyes fell to the yellowed, cheap sheet of paper clutched like a treasure in the old man's hands. Villiers did not even then offer it in evidence, but went on:

"Two months after that she married Captain Smythe. She had to, I suppose, failing to get me to be her goat. I don't think Smythe ever wanted to marry her, because soon after their son was born, in November of the same year, he went away and didn't come back. And she went on calling herself 'Mrs. Villiers.' Of course, she had no right to the name, my name. But I did not wish to stir up talk. That, too, is why I didn't print any formal notice of my marriage to my poor, dear wife, who is——"

"Did the woman—Belle Villiers—want any money for signing that paper?" put in Dayton quietly.

"No, no, dear me, no! Why should she? She had no hold on me. Our relationship had been purely friendly, I tell you. She signed it of her own free will after I had pointed out the position in which she had placed me—about to be married, myself, and——"

"May I see that statement—copy it?" asked Dayton, his heart pounding ninety to the minute. Given that document and the right to print it, he saw the Villiers case breached open again as with a high explosive. He saw the possibility of a floorwalker's legitimate right to a million dollars questioned, and a new lead to the solution of "Who killed Mrs. Villiers—and why?"

"Yes, you may see it," said old Louis, finally passing over a paper which fluttered as in a breeze, because his hand trembled so. "In fact, I so trust the *Sentinel* that I wish you to take it—the original—to your editor to keep in a safer place, in case anything comes up. I'd have given it to young Hooker—nice, clever lad, that—but I don't like his paper. And you can look up the date of the false marriage notice in the old files of your own *Sentinel* and print that notice over again along with this statement of its falsity. And at the same time you will not find in the City Hall, or the Hall of Records, or wherever it is they keep such vital statistics—you will not find any record of any such marriage; only the record of the woman's marriage to Smythe, and (if it interests you) my later marriage to my poor, dear wife, who is——"

Dayton was hardly listening. His mind was en-

gaged with what his eyes perused. On the paper appeared in the indubitable handwriting of a woman:

New York, July 9, 1883.

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that I am not, and never have been, married to Louis Henry Villiers and, furthermore, that the marriage notice which I caused to be printed in the *New York Sentinel* of June 2, 1883, was, and is, false and utterly without foundation in fact.

(sgd.) BELLE TREMAINE.

Witness: JOHN THOMAS BIGBEE.

"Who was this Bigbee?" asked Dayton after a silence.

"He was my old clerk in the hotel here. He's dead now. But there's her handwriting—to compare with the will she left."

Dayton nodded thoughtfully. There were many questions he wished to ask, but for the moment he felt that he could ask them to better results if he had the apparent facts in hand verified. He wished to get away from the Hotel de Ville as quickly as possible—but with the assurance that he could come back, like *Oliver Twist*, for more!

"Of course, I'm not doubting any of the facts you've been good enough to give us, Mr. Villiers," he said, "and it won't take me more than an hour or so to verify them. But, I'm still wondering why you are doing all this—now—so long after—and the Villiers case almost a dead issue."

The old man's face as he answered was touched with the tragedy of life's fag end.

"I have been thinking much of late," he said simply. "I have just recovered from a grave illness and—and

perhaps I may not live long. And maybe there is somebody else to consider besides this young counter jumper who has inherited all that money."

"Somebody else?" said Dayton, as calmly as he could. "You mean that Villiers Smythe may not be the legitimate heir?"

"I did not say that," Louis Villiers amended hastily. "I said 'somebody'—meaning my poor, dear wife, who——"

"I see. My mistake," said the reporter quickly, while he made a mental note of the amendment. "I won't rush into print with this—at least, not until I've seen you again. There's no terrific hurry, anyway—unless, of course, you are giving this to other papers—or to Melville Hooker of the *Lark*."

"No, only the *Sentinel*. I'm quite fond of Melville, but I don't like the *Lark*. And the original bogus notice appeared in the *Sentinel*. That's another reason. That's why I give the *Sentinel* this paper, the original denial. When you have—verified, as you call it—come in and see me again—this evening, if you are ready. There might be more that I've forgotten for the moment. My memory——"

He passed a weary hand over a glistening forehead, then reached for the handkerchief to mop his mouth. Dayton thanked him, shook a damp, limp, clammy hand, and walked at an exceptionally brisk pace toward the *Sentinel* office after he got out of the Hotel de Ville. Around him afternoon Broadway clanged, boomed, and roared. "A queer world," Dayton reflected.

Ten minutes later he was poring over a dusty bound

file of the *Sentinel* for 1883, brought to him from the "boneyard" by an office boy. The forefinger of his left hand trembled slightly as it moved down the "Marriages" column of the issue of June 2, 1883. Suddenly the finger stiffened and rested.

"Boss!" called Dayton to the city editor. The latter had been watching Dayton's face and Dayton's actions since that reporter had returned to the office and become industrious without the usual formality of reporting on his assignment. "Boss—will you step over here for a second?"

The city editor stepped immediately. Something was in the wind!

"What you got, Dickie?"

"Cast your eye on that."

The C. E. looked where the reporter's forefinger rested, and read:

VILLIERS-TREMAINE. On the 20th ult., at Washington Square, New York City, Louis H. Villiers and Isabelle Tremaine. No cards.

"Huh!" grunted the city editor. "Isabelle Tremaine? Belle Tremaine! *the* Mrs. Villiers?"

"Then cast your eye on this before I copy it and you stick the original in your desk."

The C. E. studied the document which stated that the marriage notice he had just read was bogus.

"Huh!" he grunted again. Then—"And being a nice, intelligent reporter from the *Sentinel*—what's the answer?"

"That's what I've got to find out," said Dayton.

"Go to it! Get busy, son, get busy! Whether old

Louis *did* marry this woman or he's just gone nuts—it's quite a yarn. See? Either he did marry her and both he and the woman afterward committed bigamy, or . . . Question is: Who's this young Villiers Smythe, anyway? Is he the legitimate son and heir of the murdered woman? Or has somebody been putting something across?—this lawyer, Bancroft, let's say? Clean it up to the last detail, boy! Look up the records. Tackle Bancroft. Go get it, Fido, *fetch!* I'll put another man on the Tenderloin shift to-night. You're on special assignment till this thing's cleared up!"

Chapter XVIII

SUFFICIENT FOR THE DAY

DUSK was creeping over the city when Dayton rode uptown from the Hall of Records. He had the material for a "spread story," but as to what it all meant, what motives lay behind, he was more than ever at sea.

As old Louis Villiers had prophesied, the reporter had found no record of any such marriage as had been "noticed" in the *Sentinel* of June 2, 1883. Furthermore, he had verified the record (the same produced by Bancroft in the surrogate court) of a marriage on September 17, 1883, between Belle Tremaine and Augustus Archer-Smythe, the alleged British army captain. Finally, he had found the birth registry of a son by that marriage under date of November 20, 1883, the child's name appearing as Henry Augustus Villiers Smythe. The marriage of Louis Henry Villiers and one Mary Corbin (his poor, dear wife who was upstairs at this blessed minute in the Hotel de Ville) was recorded under date of August 12, 1883.

All correct. Old Louis apparently had told the truth—at least, so far as he had told anything. It remained to be discovered why he had chosen this time to break into print with an announcement which could not alter facts nobody had ever suspected or questioned, but might suspect and question now. Dayton,

who knew his reading public, was certain that that reading public's mind would immediately ask whether Louis Villiers or Captain Archer-Smythe were the father of the accepted heir to the murdered woman's dubiously acquired fortune—if indeed, it did not question if young Villiers Smythe were the legitimate heir at all. There *might* have been a real marriage between the disclaiming old hotel proprietor and Boss Tweed's Madame Roland. There might even be a legitimate son and heir born prior to the accepted heir, roaming around loose somewhere. Many marriages and births at the period of these were not registered, officiating ministers and attending physicians failing to file the certificates. There was no penalty attached, as now, for such neglect.

A fine space-killing story, anyway! Perhaps the printing of it would bring forth the answer to the conundrum it presented. In the meantime, Bancroft would assuredly have something to say when Dayton laid the matter before him.

He was lucky enough to find the lawyer at his apartments in West Fifty-sixth Street. Of course, he had reasoned that he would find Bancroft there at this hour—between business-office closing and dinner-and-theatre hours. When the *Sentinel* man had told, without personal comment, all that he had learned and verified, Bancroft would have dismissed the whole matter as an absurdity.

"Crazy!" he suddenly cried with an explosion of laughter. "That's what old Louis Villiers is—crazy as a senile parietic! I should think you'd see that for yourself!"

"It does seem a queer action on his part," Dayton admitted. "Only—granting for the sake of argument that he isn't crazy and has some real motive in giving this thing out—what is that motive?"

"I'm not granting anything. And there's nothing in it worthy of argument," said Bancroft, offering the reporter a tin-foiled cigar from a handsome box. "But between ourselves, as man to man, it's probably a case of troubled conscience in an old man who's balancing up his books preparatory to closing up business on this mortal 'Change. He's possibly developed an exaggerated idea of what he owes the Conscience Fund. I haven't the least doubt—knowing what Mrs. Villiers was in her younger days and something about old Louis's ancient gallantries, too—that he and she had quite an affair about the time he mentions—prior to her marriage with Archer-Smythe. But what of it, now?"

"Do you suppose there was a son born of that—'affair,' as you call it?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," laughed Bancroft, holding a lighted match to Dayton's fine cigar. "What of that, either, if there had been? They were never married. She *did* marry Archer-Smythe, and the son of that marriage was, and is, legitimate, even if——"

"Just so," put in the reporter. "Apparently she would rather not have married Archer-Smythe—only did so after she failed to make it appear that Villiers was the father of her son by printing that bogus notice. Do you suppose he *was*?"

"Who—was what?"

"That Louis Villiers is really young Smythe's father?"

"It's possible, of course. But what if it were so? The law doesn't concern itself with such matters so long as the heir is born of a woman legitimately married at the time of the birth to the stated father—in this case, Captain Augustus Archer-Smythe. You'll observe that I'm holding no brief for Mrs. Villiers Smythe's morals any more than I do for old Louis's?"

"You're certainly not mincing words," said Dayton. "I appreciate that. Perhaps, then, you'll tell me why the woman called herself 'Mrs. Villiers' during her association with Louis H. around 1880, used the name again after Archer-Smythe left her with a son on her hands, and even stuck the name in at the christening of that son, Henry Augustus Villiers Smythe?"

"Mr. Dayton, you surprise me!" Bancroft humorously protested. "Don't you see? Even a woman like that had some respect for Mrs. Grundy's opinion. Perhaps the 'Mrs. Villiers' was convenient and necessary when she first adopted the name, and it seemed to her even more convenient and necessary when it became advisable to acquire a husband. Failing to get Villiers by her little trick—that marriage notice—she got Archer-Smythe to do the right thing. Having been 'Mrs. Villiers' for several years, doubtless she saw some advantage, present or future, in sticking 'Villiers' into the boy's name. And after Archer-Smythe dropped out—doubtless he was good and tired of the lady—she just kept on calling herself 'Mrs. Villiers.' As she'd never been known as Mrs. Archer-

Smythe—I gather that she made no loud announcements—it saved a lot of explanation.

“All right,” said Dayton, smoking furiously. “That’s about the way I’ve doped it out myself. I don’t think there ever was a marriage between her and old Louis, and she signed a statement to that effect when he called her bluff—although, as he himself wanted to marry Mary Corbin, he may have paid Belle something for that statement. It was a safeguard against her ever trying to blackmail him in the future for something in his past—say, around the year 1880. But be that as it may, we’re back to the original conundrum. Why is Louis springing this now?”

“A conscience running wild in team with a tottering brain,” Bancroft said with an indifference touched with impatience.

“Why didn’t he spring it at the time of Belle Tremaine Villiers’s murder, when the authorities were trying to learn all they could about the woman? Or at the time of the will hearing, when the question of young Smythe’s legality as heir was up before the surrogate?”

“Perhaps,” said Bancroft with a smile, “that was before Louis’s doctor told him he had a foot and a half in the grave. When the devil isn’t sick, he’s a diplomat. That’s the very reason Louis Villiers kept his mouth shut—up till now. It meant nothing to him, except undesirable revelations about his gallant days, if he announced what nobody suspected or everybody had forgotten.”

“Possibly,” said Dayton, “but if there’s any motive at all in his action, it was as good then as it is now.

Let's say that the prospect of meeting the Recording Angel just made him realize that he ought to act on that impulse."

"Meaning?" Bancroft queried sharply.

"He made one little slip. He let out that there was 'somebody else' to be considered besides this counter-jumper heir. Although he immediately denied that he had said 'somebody else'—meant 'somebody'—his wife—I'm positive he said, and meant, *somebody else*."

"What's on your mind, young man?" asked Bancroft humoringly, although he flicked with his little finger the cigar which had not had time to gather further ash. He had been flicking that cigar almost continuously for several minutes, Dayton had observed. "What's on your mind?"

"Simply this—that there was, perhaps, a son by that irregular union between Louis Villiers and Belle Tremaine, and perhaps the old man feels that that waif ought to be taken care of. It isn't this possible older brother's fault, you see, that he is not the legal heir."

At this Bancroft suddenly lost patience. He threw the partly smoked cigar into the unlighted asbestos-log fireplace and rose to his feet.

"Oh, enough of it!" he snapped. "I'm tired of all this! You can't print the story even as it stands, let alone plunge into theories of a suppressed heir out in the cold, cruel world. Forget it, young man! Villiers is senile and blindly raking up an old malodorous incident on a mistaken idea of righting some imagined wrong—of his own doing, most likely. *You can't print it!*"

"I'm going to," said Dayton, laying in an ash tray the fine cigar he had been smoking, as if he had forfeited right to its further enjoyment. "To-morrow morning—and without any theories. Just a statement of the facts as I've got them, including something of this interview with you."

The mask of Olympian calm dropped from Bancroft's face. Hard and forbidding was "the front of Jove" now presented to the reporter. His words came like snapped-off icicles.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, my young man, if you hope to find yourself still in a job to-morrow."

"I've heard that gentle alternative so often in my business it's become just noise to me," said Dayton, smiling.

For a few moments Greek confronted Greek. A sheet of paper with a few written lines on it, over the name "Belle Tremaine," lay on the table by the ash tray. All at once Bancroft snatched it up, read it again, and said:

"It's manifestly a forgery, anyway. It isn't Mrs. Villiers's handwriting. I'm supposed to be familiar with it."

"That's possible."

There came a tearing sound. Bancroft had ripped the page in two. He placed the pieces together and ripped them again. He reduced the paper to small flakes.

"So much for that!" said he. "Now what?"

"It was my own writing," said Dayton, almost meekly.

"Only a copy—ha?" Bancroft snarled. "Well, you

may have difficulty in obtaining another copy if you don't get in touch with Louis Villiers before I do—which I mean to take mighty good care that you don't!"

"I don't have to," said Dayton. "The original document is in the upper left-hand corner pigeonhole of the city editor's desk. For the rest, it is just possible you *could* rope and hogtie me in this apartment. You're big enough, although a bit flabby. But the *Sentinel* might wonder why I was wasting so much time on J. Loudon Bancroft and send a police platoon to remind me that the *Sentinel* doesn't go to press next week."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Bancroft.

"Don't threaten, then, especially about my job. It's all I've got."

"I have influence."

"Glad to hear it. Try it where it'll work."

Bancroft glared. Then all at once the calm Olympian front reappeared.

"We're both making fools of ourselves," said he. "Listen, Dayton. *You* know, as *I* do, that this story you propose to print is resurrecting a lot of unpleasant matter—all quite unnecessary and to no purpose that either of us can see. Forget it! It'll be worth your while."

"How much worth while?" the newspaper man asked with sudden interest.

"You reporters are notoriously underpaid."

"Oh, I dunno. In my case, only from sixty to a hundred a week. It depends on what space I grab

over and above my regular Tenderloin assignment salary."

"You like travel?"

"It's the dream of my life."

"Well, forget this and your dream's fulfilled—for a year, at least."

Dayton pondered this. Then he said thoughtfully: "Mighty nice of you. But I couldn't get away for a day or two—maybe a week or two."

"Why not?"

"I've got to clean up this Villiers assignment first," was the answer.

As Dayton spoke he got to his feet, took up his hat and coat, and moved toward the door. Bancroft started forward and blocked the exit with his large body, his hands behind him on the door knob.

"One moment!" he said grimly.

" 'Don't yo' heah dem bells?' " quoted the reporter, steadily eyeing the big blond obstruction.

"Bells? Bells! What bells?"

"Black Maria, crammed with reserves. Don't try to pull anything like that, Bancroft. You're giving yourself away. I'd print this, too, if I had a witness. It might suggest a lot to Constant Reader and Old Subscriber."

Bancroft stepped aside. "You're right," said he. "I'm a damned fool. But you got me rattled. All right—go! But I'm advising you, young man—*don't print that story!*"

"That's up to the managing editor. He can always overrule the day city editor's schedule."

"He can—eh? Well——"

"Good-night," said Dayton passing out.

"Until later!" was Bancroft's parting shot.

It was still early in the evening—hardly seven o'clock. From Bancroft's regular residence Dayton made fast time to the Hotel de Ville, twenty blocks south on Broadway. Louis Villiers was in his office, which looked even dingier under electric light. The old man seemed to have been expecting him. There was a queer smile on his face as he said "We-ell?" and heard Dayton's report on his verification of certain records; also of his interview with Bancroft.

"Ah?—Bancroft—ah?" said Louis, mopping his loose underlip, although the reporter somehow fancied the handkerchief was raised to cover a most unholy smile. "You look out for that Bancroft, young man, Mr. Dayton. A shrewd fellow, not to be trusted farther than you can watch him with one eye. I'm telling you—though you're not to print it I said so—he's at the back of a lot—lots."

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Dayton. "By the way, he sort of hinted that you and Belle Tremaine were pretty thick at one time. Not that it matters now, or is a thing the *Sentinel* would be likely to feature. But may I ask—just to get the point cleared up—there wasn't by any chance . . .? She never had any son except this heir who's called Henry Augustus Villiers Smythe?"

Old Louis Villiers put a shaky hand with a handkerchief in it to his sagging underlip. Over the handkerchief a pair of strained, staring, almost pleading eyes rested like a hunted animal's upon a hunter's. This

news Nimrod's face expressed not the slightest wile or guile.

"N-no," said the old man at last. "No!"

Dayton stood up, satisfied. "Well, Mr. Villiers," he said, "I guess there's nothing more. It's just possible Bancroft may be after you to-night to have the story killed. I hope you won't——"

"*He?*" interrupted Louis, with a surprisingly vicious snap. "No, I don't think he'll come near *me*. Oh, no! He's more likely to try his luck with your editor. But don't let him fool you *Sentinel* people like he's fooled lots. He has a way with him. Don't you let him fool you! Just you print what I've told you and——and then—we'll see."

Not much better informed than when he had first started out on the uncertain trail opened by old Villiers's remarkable disclosure, Dayton headed now for the *Sentinel* office. He was not at all dissatisfied. Sufficient for the day was the story thereof. The story of this day had all the elements of "follow-up" space in its possible further developments after the first installment.

In the editorial rooms of the *Sentinel* the day city editor had gone home, leaving the space schedule with the night C. E., Mr. Byrd. The schedule had Dayton down for an indefinite but probably large amount of space opposite the entry, "New Villiers Develop." At Dayton's entrance the night city editor shot from his chair and backed the reporter into the coat locker room.

"You've sure started something, Dickie," said Mr.

Byrd. "Lawyer Bancroft's in with the Boss trying to kill your yarn. Are we safe on it?"

"Safe as a graveyard."

"Good. O.K. then. Boss wants to see you the minute you come in. Such being the case, you're *in*!"

A few moments later Dayton was standing by the desk of the managing editor in the latter's glass-enclosed sanctum in the corner. In the visitor's chair—there is never more than one—sat a lordly Saxon-blond male in a Prince Albert coat. His tall hat reposed on top of the "Manajed's" desk. Mr. Bancroft's gloved hands rested on the gold knob of a Malacca cane. The managing editor, the keen, nervous, little man with the thin hair and the eyeglasses, had looked up quickly as Dayton appeared.

"You have not written the Louis Villiers story yet, Mr. Dayton?" said he.

"No. It's only seven-thirty. I haven't had dinner, either. I'll have it off by nine-thirty, ten at latest."

"Plenty of time, of course," said the Manajed. "But, do you think, Mr. Dayton, it would be advisable to hold it over for, say, twenty-four hours? I understand it is not likely to leak to the other papers, and Mr. Bancroft here promises that before to-morrow evening he will show us good and sufficient reason for not printing it at all. Of course, we'll have the final say on that. In the meantime, have you anything to say, Mr. Dayton, which might operate against holding over?"

Richard Dayton looked at Bancroft. That lordly person was smiling in an exasperating manner, as one who would say, "I told you so. I have influence."

"Did Mr. Bancroft," said the reporter very slowly, turning steady eyes upon his editorial chief, "did Mr. Bancroft mention that he offered me a year's travel with all expenses paid if I threw this story down, and the *Sentinel* that assigned me to get it?"

The managing editor's head snapped around. His underlip shot out and his eyes bored into Bancroft's. Nevertheless, his voice was quite soft as he said:

"No. He failed to mention any such small detail."

"*That*," cried Bancroft, rising to his feet in less dignity than fury of indignation, "is out of whole cloth! In fact, I brand it as deliberate falsehood!"

"Staff loyalty compels me for the moment to accept Mr. Dayton's statement," said the editorial chief, who had been on the point of yielding to the lawyer's request for, at least, delay. "That is all, Mr. Bancroft. I do not say that we shall print the story to-morrow morning or that we shall not. That is to be decided after I have talked with Mr. Dayton. In the meantime, you will appreciate that I have many other duties in connection with a thirty-two page issue. I bid you good-evening, Mr. Bancroft."

With a venomous glare at Dayton, the lawyer, utterly humbled for once, grabbed his tall hat, viciously jammed it on his blond head, and stalked out of the *Sentinel* offices with a muttering about yellow journalism and libel.

Ten minutes later the managing editor arose from his talk with Dayton. Standing in the doorway of the glass-enclosed sanctum, with a smiling reporter at his elbow, the slight little man whose arm was more far-

reaching than king's or president's called clearly across the office to the alert night city editor.

"The Villiers story goes, Mr. Byrd. B-head, first page, with double-leading, carrying over to first column, page two, and running as Mr. Dayton writes it within two columns, to be followed by one column re-write of Villiers case history to date."

For a moment or two the usual clamour of voices and typewriters and pneumatic copy chutes fell silent. The entire office knew what had been in the air—the old, old attempt by bribe or threat to kill or hold up a news story. Dayton and the freedom of the press had survived.

The buzz of voices, but not of typewriters, resumed. Somebody laughed. The night city editor grinned and said to Dayton:

"Go feed your face, boy, and hurry back!"

Chapter XIX

RETURNED WITH THE TIDE

THE story of the latest development in the Villiers case appeared in the first edition of the *Sentinel*.

That bold, black B-head on the *Sentinel's* front page acted like a bugle alarm in other newspaper shops, where there instantly arose sounds of much profanity and telephone calling. At the House of the Two Green Eyes, the newspaper outpost nearest the Hotel de Ville, there was a sudden stampede of the shack dwellers.

At the Hotel de Ville a sleepy night-clerk told the invading reporters that Mr. Villiers had been in bed for hours—"wasn't feeling any too good." They insisted that he be waked up. They had no first edition of the *Sentinel* to show, but told the clerk what they had learned of its lead story. The clerk seemed almost shocked to think that he worked for a person and a hotel that could come under such a sudden glare of unpleasant publicity. He did not use the house telephone, but abandoned his desk and hurried upstairs. He felt that the circumstances justified his knocking on the door of Mr. and Mrs. Villiers's private rooms. It was Mrs. Villiers, née Corbin, who answered, in a wrap.

Two minutes later the night clerk was downstairs

again, telling the reporters, gently but firmly, that Mr. Villiers was quite ill, and Mrs. Villiers said nobody was going to talk to newspapermen at this hour of the night—two o'clock in the morning!

Stealthy Hooker was among the reportorial group. He was about to say something. He'd always had a special pull with old Louis. But he changed his mind about exercising the pull just then. When, however, the other reporters had gone away to report non-success, the *Lark's* nighthawk, who just couldn't understand being beaten in his own special field, utilized the telephone of a near-by all-night drug-store and called up Louis Villiers personally. He succeeded in getting a connection with the hotel keeper's bedroom—the night clerk being aware of his employer's liking for Mr. Hooker—but it was Mrs. Villiers who responded. Learning who was speaking, she promptly hung up with just one spiteful remark:

"No! I'd talk to the rest sooner than *you*, at least!"

Louis Villiers was sitting up in bed, staring at his wife with something of growing doubt in his eyes. Mrs. Villiers, née Corbin, turned from the 'phone upon which she had banged the receiver.

"You—old—doddering—*fool!*" she almost hissed. "Wasn't it bad enough without—*this?* Now I *know* you're going to a sanitarium!"

"But—my dear!" protested Louis Henry Villiers, "I did it only—in justice—to you. You nagged me so about—her—and I thought——"

"You *thought!* O-o-oh!" Mrs. Louis Henry Villiers began to honk hysterically. "A two-year-old

would have had more sense! What good does *this* do? *In justice to me*, he says! O-o-o-oh!"

Then the vials of her hysterical wrath overflowed on a man who began to perceive that, perhaps—after all—it might have been better if he had kept his mouth shut before his "poor, dear wife" (who was very much upstairs at this unblessed moment) began to open hers!

Richard Dayton used his latchkey and went upstairs to his apartments in a West Forty-fifth Street rooming house. When he switched on the light in his bedroom he discovered a man there, fully dressed but sound asleep on the bed. It was Oren Grell!

"How'd you get up here?" he asked, when he had shaken the sleeper to wakefulness.

"Oh, that you, Dickie? 'S me—Grell. Landlady remembered me. I said I'd wait. All right with her."

Wise landlady! She had recognized a friend of Mr. Dayton, and that Mr. Dayton's friend would be better off almost anywhere than in the streets. If Mr. Dayton should object she could always point out that Mr. Dayton shouldn't have friends who had to be taken care of like this.

"Where's—Mrs. Grell?" inquired Dayton, throwing aside his hat, coat, and the first edition—the latter as if it contained nothing of special interest to him.

"Don't know," said Grell dully. "Last I saw of her she was driving away from the dock with some of the merry gang she picked up on the steamer coming back. She was in first cabin. I was in second, though she didn't know I was aboard at all."

"Oh?" said Dayton, realizing that something had gone wrong—everything, probably. "Seeing you're occupying my bed, maybe you feel like explaining."

"Got anything to drink, Dickie? I can't think—talk. Need a hair of the dog."

In silence Dayton presently brought a mixed high-ball from the sitting room beyond the bathroom of his modest suite. After Grell had swallowed the drink, and it braced him, he told his story. It was a tale that shocked the man in Dayton while it interested the reporter.

It appeared that Grell and Frances Kimball had never gone through a marriage ceremony. The son of the Rochester banker explained about this omission. Dayton thought he understood—at least, the incomprehensible in some women. It was a small detail, anyway. But after three months—let alone a year—it was apparent that these two never would marry.

"She was right about herself," said Grell, who spoke and acted like a man who has walked through hell and dropped something of himself there. "At least, she became more than ever convinced that she was right about herself, and in that frame of mind—hipped on it, she was—let go. Made the best of it—or worst of it—I dunno."

For nearly three weeks they had been happy in the intoxication of youth and mutual love and new scenes. On the way over from Boston Grell had imbibed considerably. He admitted it. It was easy—so difficult not to—aboard ship, where there was an idle and moneyed holiday group. He frankly blamed himself for coaxing Frances into frequent indulgence in the

insidious cocktail. She liked it, and presently needed no coaxing. She was very popular. Beautiful, refined, and brilliant as a ruby—a flushed diamond—when she had had a cocktail. She even went into the smoke-room (women sometimes did, even in days before there was hardly room for males) and she proved to be no prude even when anecdotes acquired the fifth-drink hue. Grell didn't like that, of course. They had their first tiff over it. She had scored game with just one remark: "Don't be *provincial*, Oren."

London was a happy period, only that at the tail end of the ten days spent there she confessed herself bored with portraits, tombstones, monuments, and historic piles. Old taverns around Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill interested her; also Soho and night trips through Whitechapel and Limehouse. These excursions took on an additional colour when there was sherry-and-bitters along the line.

Then Paris. There the cloud, at first no bigger than her own little hand, began to overshadow the whole heaven of their relations.

"It wasn't liquor," said Grell, sitting on the edge of the bed with his bowed head in his hands, "though I blame myself for that. Liquor only brought out the thing that seemed to—to underlie—It's hard to explain. The usual sights of Paris, like the National Gallery in London and the Tower and that sort of thing, only mildly interested her. She was at her best and brightest around Montmartre and the Boul' Mich' at night. The 'Dead Rat' and such places seemed to appeal to her imagination more than Napoleon's Tomb or the Louvre. She explained it as a 'sociologic

interest.' Sociologic! God! She just liked that sort of thing! That's all it was, Dickie—that's all—she *liked* it!"

But it was some time before it dawned upon him that that was all it was. If she did not decline a drink on the morning after—she even proposed one when Grell, thirsting, suffered his hang-over because he feared for her—he tried to believe that it was only for relief from a headache growing out of late hours. But liquor was not the trouble—just an aggravation of the underlying thing. She had what she called a streak. There was nothing physically unnatural about her. It was just a quirk of her mind. She admitted it after an outburst on his part when they had returned to their hotel from a place where——

"It wasn't a fit show for a white man, let alone an American woman of refinement—like Frances. When I saw what was coming I said: 'Let's go. This is too thick. The air's healthier in the Morgue.' She was staring at the little stage—and what was going on there. The tense interest of her face—Dickie, it was as if somebody stuck a foot of cold steel through my guts. She wouldn't leave. Don't think she heard me. Nudged me to keep still. Afterward she said again it was sociologic interest—to study how far human depravity could go—and the reactions in the faces about her. She made a full meal of it, Dickie—thrived on it. It made me sick—sicker'n anything I saw that first night in the Tenderloin with you. I told her I didn't care by what fancy name she called her interest, to me it was just plain putrid, and any sort of interest in it was rottenness, too. That's where the first real,

big flare-up came. She went out alone next evening. I let her go, like a sullen fool. Then I got drunk, drifting from one place to another, looking for her. She came back to the hotel shortly before dawn, looking like—I dunno. Maybe she just stayed out in sheer cussedness. When I asked where she'd been she smiled in a bitter-sweet way and said she'd been studying things it was no use expecting me to understand."

He realized then that there was, and always would be, an irreconcilable difference in their individual tastes. But he strove desperately to find a common ground for their future together, loving her as he did, and as perhaps she loved him, or thought she did while things went the way her will or wilfulness inclined. Everywhere—in Paris, Rome, Florence, Naples, and elsewhere—the streak was a black barrier between them. Had she admitted that it was her human weakness to be interested in such matters, he would have tried to understand and make the best of it, reasoning with her, perhaps even condoning. But that she should try to fool him—and fool herself—with talk of sociologic interest in human perversity maddened him, filled him with an indescribable grief.

Then a shortage of cash capped matters. Grell had omitted writing to his father from Boston, save for a scribbled note that he was starting for Europe. At that time his every moment was preoccupied. While scribbled notes to Dayton and Grell, senior, were easy, the explanatory letter to his father called for consideration and some length. Better it be written at sea leisure. Somehow that letter did not get written at sea, and each day thereafter the writing of it became

more difficult. In the meantime, Grell's income, after he and Frances had spent what remained of his original two thousand dollars, was but one thousand dollars on the first day of every quarter. In the note to his father he had given the address of a well-known tourist agency in Europe, and there was a draft for one thousand dollars awaiting him when he and Frances reached Naples. For two weeks before that they had been counting even *centesimi* with calculating anxiety. The daughter of Clavering Kimball possessed nothing more than the clothes and remaining small change with which she had left New York, and as the settlement of the Kimball estate in receivership would not half liquidate her late father's liabilities, she had, and would have, nothing to contribute to the common funds.

With the thousand dollars, after a short trip to Capri—where the Blue Grotto somehow failed them—they went to Monte Carlo. Grell had a desperate dream that possibly the balance of the quarterly allowance might there multiply itself. Frances shared the dream, though not desperately, and tried to make it come true. It was Grell who played and lost. It was Frances who played and won. Thereafter Grell did not play, but hung around while his beautiful lady leaned over the table through interminable hours during which she rubbed elbows and exchanged growing familiarities with the heterogeneous company that worships at the shrine of Chance. Sometimes she lost and sometimes she won, her mood reacting accordingly.

As the days went by the necessity of winning became (for her) submerged in the fascination of the game.

Had she broken the bank it is probable that she would have returned to risk her winnings next day.

The crash came when he saw her turn from the table, penniless. Rather, it came on the following night when he discovered her a winner by about fifty thousand francs! Her luck had turned—after she had accepted a loan from the most ardent of her male acquaintances in the Casino.

"I don't have to tell you the rest," Grell said to Dayton. "My own moral sense was battered out of shape. I even borrowed two hundred dollars from her, myself—so I could come home—which I did, in the second class. I wanted her to come with me, forget it and start all over again, in Rochester, say. But she had tasted the wine of life—its dregs, rather—and liked 'em. I pleaded. I hung on for a bit, hoping she'd lose everything and come to me when she couldn't borrow again without paying a price too high for her. But it was no use. I was eating on the bills she—or her lender—paid. I couldn't stick it, Dayton. There was one more flare-up. That's when I borrowed the two hundred dollars and started for home as best I could make it. It's a curious bit of irony that she herself came back in the first cabin of the same steamer, never dreaming her provincial consort was down among the hoi polloi of the main deck aft, Lazarus catching glimpses of her—and her latest acquaintances.

"Anyway—we aren't married, and now——"

"You never will be," said Dayton. "And maybe a mighty fine thing, too—for you—although I confess I'm floored!"

"Thought you would be. I'm worse—gone through the floor into the basement cellar," said Grell with a bitter laugh.

"Well, you're not going to take it lying down with a skinful of red-eye. Buck up!"

"You don't seem to see the real trouble," said the other, miserably.

"What else?"

"I'm—I'm still—I can't help myself, somehow—in love with her. I'm still hoping—like a damn' fool——"

Dayton stared. Then, muttering something, he got up and walked through to the little sitting room, returning presently with two highballs.

"Have another. I'll join you. Then peel off and sleep right where you are," said he with a practical note. "I'll bunk on the couch in the front room. To-morrow I'll get you a room from the old lady and see you through—if you don't get so soused Mamma fires you out. No sense in howling over spilled beans, Grell. You're still in your twenties. You've had a love affair that's gone blooey. For the rest—remember what the Count of Monte Cristo remarked when he came up for air: '*Free! and the world is mine!*' "

He touched his glass to Grell's. The son of the Rochester banker smiled wanly.

"Here's how!" said Dayton.

Chapter XX

“WHAT’LL IT BE?”

WHEN Bancroft in high dudgeon left the *Sentinel* offices he went directly to the Frivolities Theatre, which was around the corner in Forty-second Street. He found there, as he had been confident he would, H. Augustus Villiers Smythe, a mighty admirer of the dimpled knees of Dolly Carnation. The ex-floor-walker, rakishly gallant in opera cape and crush hat, was smoking a cigarette in the lobby. The show had not yet begun.

“Come along with me, Smythe. We’ve got to have a little talk, you and I,” said the man whose right hand closed like a vise on the other’s shoulder.

Villiers Smythe, who was rapidly forgetting that he had not always been rich, stared insolently into the eyes of his man of affairs. But what he saw in those eyes affected the yellow streak in him.

“But, I got an engagement——” he began.

“It can wait,” said Bancroft crisply, at the same time piloting Smythe to the curb outside. There, a hansom quickly responded to the signal of a raised malacca cane.

Fifteen minutes later the lawyer and his client were in “Mr. Prestcott’s” unofficial apartment in East Twenty-eighth Street.

"Well?" said Smythe, with a feeble attempt at bold challenge. "What's it all about?"

Bancroft told him what had happened—Louis Villiers and all the rest of it—and what was likely to appear on the newsstands next morning. Smythe's face paled. He was frightened; mainly because he did not clearly perceive the nature of the danger; only saw danger reflected in Bancroft's eyes.

"Well, what's it got to do with me, anyway, if some old geezer shoots off his face about him an' the old dame—my mother?"

"What has it got to do with you, Smythe?—Villiers Smythe? Just this—and it's been in my mind for some time to warn you of it by way of making you, perhaps, a little less cocksure of your position in the world. I'm not saying old Villiers was married to your mother, which might establish that her marriage to your father was bigamous. I'm not saying you're illegitimate, or that another may be legal heir to the fortune you are squandering like a child with pennies from a bank it has been permitted to open. No, I'm not stating anything except this: I happen to know that you have a brother alive who is two years older than you are!"

"A brother?—older?"

"Strictly speaking, a half brother, your mother's first-born."

It took a few moments for the possible significance of this to sink into Smythe's rather dazed mind. Then the instinct of self-preservation stimulated him to thought and speech.

"What ya tryin' to give me? Even if I have a

brother or a half brother older'n me, what's the diff if he ain't the heir?"

"How do you know he isn't?"

Smythe's jaw dropped. The bottom of his world seemed in danger of dropping out from under him. He managed to articulate jerkily:

"You know this fella?—who he is?—where he is?"

"Yes, I know where he is. I could have him in this room inside of half an hour."

Smythe just stared, now quite speechless. Bancroft observed with satisfaction the punctured state of this human balloon. Just what he had expected—and hoped for. This young man had been getting a bit out of hand.

"Mind you, my boy," he went on in a more friendly tone, "I'm not planning to resurrect this brother of yours so long as you take my advice—do exactly what I tell you to do. Fortunately, only one other person besides myself—and now, you—know anything about this brother or where he is. This other person—not meaning you—you know next to nothing—is not likely to produce him. In fact, Louis Villiers's action in disowning certain associations with your mother is the best guarantee that he is anxious to stand from under. In disowning that association he naturally would far from suggest any son born of it. Indeed, his statement, given to the *Sentinel* out of some crazy conception of duty to his present wife, or for the shriving of his own conscience, is more likely to suggest to a scandal-loving public that *you* may be his son; that he, and not Archer-Smythe, is your father."

"W-well," faltered the heir of the moment. "How'd that affect me—my position?"

"Not at all," Bancroft assured him cheerfully. "You're as safe as the law itself—so long as I, perhaps admitting a possible error in the will hearing, do not raise a question as to whether you are the legitimate heir or your elder brother is, after all. It would be a most vexatious business for me—and very unpleasant, of course, for you—if I found myself compelled, in professional honour, to raise such an issue. But as there is nothing to show that this brother of yours is legitimate, nothing to show that your mother was ever married to Louis Villiers and undivorced before she married your—ha!—father-in-law—I certainly do not propose to produce this young Villiers against my present client, Villiers Smythe. That is—so long as you behave yourself, young man."

"What—what do you want me to do?" The heir spoke in a frightened whisper.

The lawyer smiled. He had achieved what he had hoped for; taken the wind out of this contemptible young fool's sails.

"What do I want you to do?" said he, laying a quite paternal hand upon Smythe's shoulder and smiling almost affectionately. "Not a thing, my boy, not a thing; except that, beginning with to-morrow, you conduct yourself with a dignity more becoming a man of means; refer all newspaper interviewers to me, without exception and under any and all circumstances; and, mainly, I shall expect you in the future to place yourself under my guidance and act upon such advice as I may have occasion to offer, with (if I may say so) a

little more grace than you've been showing of late. For the rest—when that story comes out to-morrow morning—if it does—don't worry! You're safe!"

The instinct of self-preservation, which makes even a rabbit think, act, and develop cunning, had been working fast in the brain of Smythe. Now he gathered courage from Bancroft's less stern, more reproachfully paternal, attitude, and said with a laugh of nervous tension relaxed!

"Sure I'm safe! An' I ain't gonna do the worryin'. Why should I? I ain't such a ninny as maybe you think me, Bancroft. It was you, an' not me, as said I was heir to this money. It was you, an' not me, as did all the work of cinching it in court. I dunno what you think you *know* about this precious brother o' mine, or what you're maybe figgerin' to do about him if I don't do everything you order me to. But I can see this much pretty dam' plain—that if you start anythin' it's you will have to stand the gaff more'n me. You ain't got such a helluva saintly name among lawyers, anyway, an'——"

"That'll be about all from you, young man!" snapped Bancroft, white with sudden anger at the other's boldness.

"You needn't snarl at me, Bancroft!" the young man went on in a rapid, word-chewing way. "I ain't scared of you, because I can see through you. You're out all the time for J. Loudon Bancroft, an' it wouldn't be none of that professional honour stuff 'ud make you change your step if the first foot you put forward paid better. Why, gosh darn it!" he almost yelled, "if you started blattin' anythin' to queer me an' my money I

might start somethin' myself! Maybe you're figgerin' to get your hooks on the whole business before you're through. I dunno. But suppose I was to get up on my virtuous hind legs an' demand—yessir, demand!—a clearin'-up of the whole show, includin' the mystery about who killed my poor old mother? Supposin' I said you tried to squeeze me an' hinted I wouldn't be surprised if *you* could tell just how an' why the ol' dame got choked—an' who done it—an'——"

"Shut up, you dam' fool!" snarled Bancroft, suddenly throwing his whole weight forward and pinning Smythe to the wall with a strong white hand at the young man's throat.

"L-lemme go! Lemme g-go!" gurgled Smythe, again thoroughly frightened. "I—I didn't mean it—I was j-just——"

Bancroft released his throat hold and stepped back a pace, remaining standing, however, with his narrowed eyes fixed upon the other's face.

Smythe fingered his throat. He had a momentary vision of an old woman on a park bench. Bancroft continued to peer through narrowed eyes, his mouth twisted to a threatening leer. The heir to a million dollars started to edge sidewise from his man of affairs, but the man of affairs moved with him, heading him off. Smythe, trapped, began to whine.

"What started all this, anyway? I didn't do you nothin'."

Still Bancroft held him with that disconcerting peering leer from a menacing face jutting forward from a corded neck. Smythe lost his nerve completely.

"Cut it out, Mr. Bancroft!" he almost screamed. "For God's sake, cut it——"

The apartment telephone rang with a metallic jar that made the two men start and broke the spell. While Bancroft went to answer the call, Smythe adjusted his disarranged black bow tie and made as if to get his hat and go while going was perhaps possible. But Bancroft looked up just then from the 'phone with a resumption of his usual calm and not ungenial front.

"One moment, Harry," said he, placing a hand over the receiver cup. (He had never called the other "Harry" before.) "I've got a surprise for you, a pleasant surprise." Into the telephone, from which he removed his hand: "Send the visitor up."

The Bancroft who got up from the 'phone on the table was a very different person from the one who had sat down to it. He was smiling with evident pleasure, albeit he appeared vastly surprised.

"Well, well," he said, half to himself. "Well, well, well!"

He walked up and down the room, alternately rubbing his palms together, then linking his hands behind his back and twiddling his twined fingers. Turning, he looked quietly at Smythe and said, laughing:

"Forget it, my boy, forget it! We've been acting like a pair of lunatics. But you got me boiling—which is not surprising. Just be a little ashamed of what you said and we'll consider that you never said it."

He spun around and made for the little hall of the apartments just as a humming sound in the building

ended with the slight crash of an elevator gate being opened. Bancroft was at the apartment door simultaneously with the call of its buzzer. With a beaming face, in which was a proper degree of amazement, he looked at Frances Kimball.

"Well, well, well!" cried he. "This is the biggest surprise of my life! Come in, my dear! Let me take your cloak. And where, if I may venture to ask, where is——? You never happened to mention his name. I'll just call you 'Frances,' which is, of course, an old privilege and pleasure."

All the time he was studying her face. She was changed. She looked years, more than months, older, a little more worldly wise, too, he fancied. And he detected a touch of colour that was not the natural bloom of the Frances Kimball of yore. She, in turn, was regarding him with a curious air of inquiry, of speculation. Apparently, she decided to have something over and done.

"Oh, that was all nonsense," she said with a wry smile, not quite meeting his eyes as she spoke. "I just wanted to get away by myself, away from everything, even you, Jim. But there was one little material thing I overlooked."

"You mean—you're not—" having mind of the other person inside, he whispered—"married?"

"No. I'm not married," she said. "Otherwise I might have someone else to go to in my ridiculous dilemma."

"What's the trouble? Can I be of assistance?"

"If you will, Jim. It's the little material thing I overlooked. I haven't any money. Lend me some."

"So that's all it is?" He laughed. Then, gravely: "I appreciate your coming to me. But——" He put a finger to his lips, as if suddenly he recalled that "Miss Forrest" had again stumbled upon another visitor in the "Prestcott" apartments. "We'll attend to that little matter later, Frances. Don't worry!" he whispered. "In the meantime, there's someone here——"

"But, Jim!" she breathed, though with less dismay than on that former occasion.

"It's the same person, which makes it all right," he chuckled. "He's vastly improved, really. You'll hardly know him. Shows the advantage to one's general well-being of—a little of that material thing you overlooked. Come in and greet a former slight acquaintance."

Frances Kimball, who, after a rather depressing interview with her late father's attorney, Bronson Ely, had bethought her of J. Loudon Bancroft as a temporary creditor, entered the sitting room of the apartments.

"Harry, my boy," said Bancroft, as if he had not been at Smythe's throat a few minutes before. "You remember Miss Kimball, of course? She's just back from a little trip to Europe."

"Sure I do! Wouldn't be likely to forget a face like hers," said Smythe, rising with a crude attempt at gallantry. "But I thought her name was—Forrester, or something like that?"

"No, no—Kimball—Miss Frances Kimball, daughter of the late Clavering Kimball of Wall Street. You might have heard *that* name?"

"Oh!" said Smythe, duly impressed. He had been too interested in his own affairs to read the details of the Kimball débâcle, which synchronized with the pre-occupying matters surrounding his sudden prospective rise to fortune.

Yet the ex-floorwalker, part of whose business at Heinemann's had been to store and remember faces and names, knew that the Beautiful Lady had not been Miss Kimball that other time. This knowledge, and its suggestion to his mind that in consequence he might have "a little something on" Miss Forrest—and J. Loudon Bancroft—imbued the young man with a sense of that more even footing which makes for greater ease in social manner. Besides, he had caught the quick, inquiring, slightly reproachful glance the lady had flashed at the lawyer. Bancroft had responded with a reassuring smile which seemed to say, "Might as well get this over now. He'd be bound to learn it later, anyway."

"I'm sure glad to meet you again, Miss—Kimball," said the present spender of the interest on one million dollars. "I've often thought about you—oh, a lot more'n I'd have the nerve to say."

Frances Kimball seemed faintly amused over this. "Really," she said, without inflection.

"Let's have a reunion cocktail!" Bancroft put in, quite gaily.

As he went to the kitchenette to get the materials he was still smiling as if this reappearance of Frances and two things she had told him in the hall were gifts of the gods.

She was *not* married. She needed money. Well, there was a million dollars lying around in that front room, and all she had to do was reach out her dainty hand and pick it up. After that . . .

"What'll it be?" Bancroft sang out in a genial voice from the kitchenette to the pair in the sitting room, "Martini or Manhattan?"

Chapter XXI

THE BOY THAT CAME BACK

As earliest dawn was breaking over New York, and while Richard Dayton and his unexpected guest still slept, Stealthy Hooker was smoking successive ready-made cigarettes in a shabby bedroom of a Tenderloin third-rate hotel. This room was the place the Rounder called, not "home," but "the hay."

Sleep was far from Stealthy's thoughts. He had forgotten even to remove his hat—a faded felt affair with a rakishly twisted brim. The other eye was fixed on a copy of the first city edition of the New York *Sentinel*, which the nighthawk had taken pains to procure before beating the dawn to his roost. The newspaper, which showed by its careless refolding that it had been read, lay on the floor's stained ingrain carpeting with that B-head face up. Stealthy sat on the edge of the single bed, gloomily regarding the latest Villiers story with that eye not eclipsed by the slouchy felt hat.

He was puzzled and filled with resentment, not so much against Louis Villiers or Richard Dayton, but against things generally. He did not blame anybody—not even himself—that the *Sentinel* should have put one over in a class of story which he prided himself belonged in his own special field. He—and the *Lark*

—had been scooped in common with all the metropolitan regulars. There was some comfort and a degree of alibi in the fact that the *Lark* was beaten in the best of company. But he failed to comprehend why one whom he had long regarded as a particular stand-by and source of spicy Rialto news should have neglected Stealthy Hooker in handing out that story.

And that response he had received when he called up old Louis three hours before—it was now about 5 A. M.—and found himself addressing old Louis's wife——

“I'd talk to the rest sooner than *you*, at least!”

What did Mrs. Louis nurse against him, anyway? He had seen the dame only once or twice around the Hotel de Ville. Old Louis had never offered to introduce his reporter friend. In fact, the appearance of Mary Villiers had always been the signal for the “interview” to end suddenly. Louis invariably discovered other pressing business elsewhere. And Mary Villiers's eyes had never lighted with any degree of warmth when they fell upon Stealthy Hooker and her hotel-proprietor husband with their heads together over some bit of Broadway spice.

Stealthy had always sensed that the dame had it in for him—for some reason not at all clear. It was less than ever clear, now, save that as through a kind of fog Melville Hooker began to suspect the presence of something material. Several times since he had heard of the *Sentinel* scoop—and particularly since he had read the story itself and smoked a few of his special cigarettes—his brain, or his news hunch, had dimly

perceived the shape of that material thing through momentary breaks in the fog.

It was such a wild and fantastic shape that he refused at first to believe it anything but some grotesque exaggeration, such as often does occur in fog—especially when the one who tries to penetrate that mist has been smoking too many doctored cigarettes. But despite his refusal to take the thing as a possible reality, his efforts to regard the idea as quite chimerical were not successful. His mind kept on reverting to it, building around it, even as does a day dreamer who constructs a castle-in-air and creates a world about it to suit the inclination of his desires.

“I got to quit this!” muttered Stealthy, resolutely laying a partly smoked cigarette in an ash tray in which there were several shorter fag ends. “I’m seeing things.”

He hooked his slouchy hat on the back of the one chair in the room, undressed himself, and presently lay down on the single bed, after pulling down a green shade and closing old-fashioned jalousies, thus cutting out the increasing rosy light of New York dawn. But he failed to sleep. The figurative fog parted, revealed the fantastic thing, and closed again. Once or twice the fog actually lifted momentarily, so that he saw the shape of the thing in a fairly clear light. But what he saw, or thought he saw, was so staggering that he more than ever refused to believe it anything but—too many drops of a certain tincture in those cigarettes.

Unable to sleep, he tried to reason the thing upon a basis of facts that might possibly lead up to it and make it plausible. Principally, there was old Louis’s

long and loyal mindfulness of Stealthy's interests. Then there was Mrs. Louis's unabating resentment of her husband's confidings in the *Lark* reporter. One was as odd as the other, although up to the present hour Hooker had given little thought to either.

He found himself recalling the first time he had met Louis Villiers. Stealthy had been about eighteen then (he was now nearly twenty-five) and had just acquired the job he still held, had created what it was. At first the *Lark* had agreed to pay him half the regular space rate for such Broadway news items as he could pick up along the Rialto. A more literate person did the writing-up in the *Lark* office—still did, in fact. It is doubtful if Melville Hooker ever in his life wrote a single paragraph that saw cold type as he wrote it. There are still not a few reporters like Stealthy Hooker.

It was while burrowing here and ferreting there, sticking his nose in at every centre of night life from the Metropole at Forty-second to the Amen Corner of the Fifth Avenue Hotel nearly twenty blocks south, that he had first encountered Louis Villiers of the Hotel de Ville. The prematurely aged man seemed to take a fancy to the young *Lark* tipster the instant he looked into his face and heard his name. Not that there was anything vastly interesting in that name. For years—as long as Stealthy could remember—he had borne that name, while realizing that it was not his. But he had consistently tried to forget how he came by it. Now he thought again on a portion of his history upon which ordinarily he did not care to linger.

His earliest actual memory of himself was in a

rooming house in the Tenderloin. The woman he at first thought to be his mother took in lodgers—mostly theatrical persons temporarily off the road—and kept their trunks when, as frequently happened, they fell shy of their room rent. In the evenings his “mother” drank much beer in company with her lazy husband, who was always called Mister Hooker, a broken-down person of possibly fair antecedents and a pointed aversion to work. Mister Hooker, however, was a man of sounding, if not always sound, ideas. It was doubtless he who selected Melville as a sounding name for the boy, who, Mister Hooker was wont to declare in his beerier moments, was “no blood of mine—just farmed out.”

Mister Hooker despised the rooming-house business. Confessing that he had “no mind for details,” he allowed his wife to assume all its responsibilities and labours; borrowing, however, as much of the profits as he needed for clothes, beer, tobacco, etc. Borrowing, he called it, because later it was all to be paid back with interest when he carried out his Great Idea. This idea was to take whatever accrued from the profits and the final sale of the rooming house and reinvest in a farm in the Middle West. In his beerier moods he sometimes varied his disowning of the boy with the statement that “bein’ a Gentleman Farmer is better ’n bein’ farmed out.” By which he may have been hinting that some day little Melville might step into the shoes of Mister Hooker. Which was a generous thought—considering.

In the meantime, the prospective Gentleman-Farmer-in-the-Middle-West encouraged thrift toward

the fulfillment of his dream. Of course, beer and tobacco were necessities. Work, too. But in the latter there was always that peril of a man becoming tied down to the city—which would be disastrous to the Great Idea. When Stealthy was not chasing the duck—carrying evening pails of beer from the corner saloon to his doughty guardians—he was earning odd dollars about the Tenderloin as an itinerant shoe shiner with a portable outfit consisting of a wooden box containing brushes, rags, and shine pastes. He saw no great future in the selling of newspapers, as so many future mayors, governors, and captains of industry have done. In the shine business he gained larger and broader acquaintance with all sorts and conditions of men.

Mister Hooker collected as much of Stealthy's earnings for each day as the boy admitted, rather than permitted. It was Mister Hooker who, with probable good reason, first applied the name that stuck—Stealthy. Before the boy was twelve he was the perfectly evolved, though still adolescent, Tenderloin Rounder. He knew everybody and everything worth knowing along the Rialto, and if "it happened on Broadway" Stealthy usually had advance information. Therefore the tragedy in the boy's cosmos when Mister Hooker one day sold the rooming-house property over his wife's head and took her and Stealthy Ohio-ward to the execution of that Great Idea. It did not appear in the light of tragedy to the boy until after he discovered that all the Indians and buckskinned scouts had recently left Ohio, and that life in the Middle West lacked a lot of the things that were necessary to

his living, being, and breathing. How the Great Idea worked out he did not stay to learn. He abandoned the Hooker pair within a week and beat his way back to his native air in that section of little old New York bounded by Fourteenth and Forty-second streets south and north and Eighth and Lexington avenues west and east.

In time he got that try-out job on the *Lark* and made himself worth more to that newspaper than that newspaper was worth to him. And it was shortly after he became a journalist that he met Louis Villiers, whose face always brightened when he saw Melville Hooker. The hotel proprietor seemed to make a protégé of him and frequently asked him about his antecedents. And when he heard the sallow youth's history retold, Louis always nodded his head and said:

"It's strange, very strange, these Hooker people taking you West like that and—and you coming right back like a homing pigeon."

Louis Villiers was the best friend the young tipster of the *Lark* had in his early reportorial days. Almost like a father to him. And that was why it hurt Stealthy now to think that old Louis had passed him up and given that sensational yarn to Dayton of the *Sentinel*.

Then there was the nature of the story itself.

Stealthy, unable to sleep, got out of bed, let in some of the dawn light, and smoked another of his ready-made cigarettes. Under the stimulus or balm of the stuff with which he doctored his tobacco—or had it doctored—his brain became curiously prescient. He began to *see* things with a vengeance. His mind's eye roved hither and thither among that mind's curious

pigeonholes. In a little while he was working with a stub of pencil and a scrap of that copy paper which is never far from a news gleaner's person. Stealthy was making notes. They read something like this, revealing among other things why his *Lark* stories were never written by himself.

(1) I was farmed out to Mister Hooker and his frau. Hooker said I was none of his. Ma Hooker said none of hers, either. She had to—in self-defense—when the old man got gabby.

(2) Louis Villiers fell for me like I was his own son and was interested about the Hookers going West. Never seemed tired of hearing that yarn.

(3) Mrs. Louis hates me like hell—and Louis always chased me when she come around.

(4) "I'd talk to the rest sooner than *you*, at least!" *Get that one!*

(5) Bancroft passed me a century for no reason I ever seen—at the time.

(6) Louis yarn in the *Sent.* as good as states what he's denying—that he was as good as married to Belle Tremane.

(7) He don't give the yarn to me—Mrs. Louis says "the rest sooner than *me!*"

(8) Bancroft said himself I'm a dead ringer for this Smythe that got all that coosh.

(9) Oh, say, can you see——???

Chapter XXII

FLASH IN THE PAN

THERE are some newspaper stories which, promising follow-up space for days, even weeks, collapse like a too highly inflated balloon suddenly burst. That is to say, they do not gradually lose shape, but utterly cease to exist after one exploding bang. And that was what happened to the Hotel de Ville development of the old Villiers story.

A flash in the pan, so far as the newspaper men were concerned for the day (whose news is sufficient thereof), although that flash was to have results which none of them foresaw and few recognized when they developed. Louis Villiers had merely walked onto the stage, made a lurid declamation which now turned out to have apparently nothing to do with the play, and made an exit which, so far as his usefulness to the news gleaners went, was final. Only one of these reporters ever saw him again in life—for he passed away shortly afterward in a private sanitarium, attended to the last by his "poor, dear wife." And that reporter was not Richard Dayton.

That the bottom had indeed dropped out of the Villiers story again was made clearer to the gentlemen of the press when later in the day they were admitted to Bancroft's office downtown. The lawyer was stand-

ing behind his desk, his back to the windows fronting on Broadway, as they entered. His countenance wore a severe, impatient expression, and his eyes moved over the faces of the reporters with no kindling of real or assumed affection for the press. For a second his gaze rested on Stealthy Hooker, who was eyeing the lawyer in a queer, speculative way. Then Bancroft, quickly averting his eyes from the Rounder, let them fall ominously upon Mr. Richard Dayton of the *Sentinel*.

"So there you are, young man!" said he with an air of lofty contempt. "You printed the story in the face of my warning that it was but the vapouring of an old man's mind. I suppose you have discovered that Mr. Villiers, realizing his senseless error of judgment, has left town, and your fine story strikes a snag, or—which is more true—a dead end. I hope, Mr. Dayton, you still cherish the notion that you have covered yourself with journalistic glory. And I'm sure these other gentlemen of the press will appreciate the fact that at last the superjournalism of the self-glorifying *Sentinel* has condescended to the sere and yellow!"

"Oh, it's all in the day's work," said Dayton, outwardly calm though inwardly much embarrassed. "The *Sentinel* will survive, I imagine, because the Villiers case isn't through yet."

"I think you'll be through first," said Bancroft savagely. "I'm not done with you, young man. You'll sweat for this when I get around to it."

"I may do some sweating myself to *get* around to it," said Dayton. "I'm not done with you, either, Bancroft."

"What d'y' mean by that?"

"Just what you say old Louis Villiers's story means—not a thing—apparently."

For a few seconds lawyer and reporter glared each at the other. It was on Dayton's tongue to say, "Boys, this fellow tried to *buy off* that story!" but he decided to keep that bit of possibly valuable information to himself for future use. Perhaps Bancroft read what was almost on the other's lips, for he quickly dismissed the unpleasant turn of affairs with a lordly wave of his hand.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "as I have repeatedly told others from your respective papers to-day, I have nothing to say except that the facts as stated in the *Sentinel* were accurate enough, although I fail to see what they lead to or why they were ever printed. What sense is there in peeping through keyholes of twenty-odd years ago? That's all!"

"For the moment," amended Richard Dayton, "the keyholes being stuffed after twenty-odd years."

With that he turned and went out, followed by his confrères, who thought they saw at least some space growing out of this session to pay them for their time, which, when they drew a blank assignment, was worth only fifty cents an hour under their office guarantee.

It was only when he left Bancroft's office that Dayton missed Grell, who had been with him when he started off. Jonathan would doubtless turn up at their common lodging house that night, if he did not reappear sooner and elsewhere. Dayton himself returned to the *Sentinel* offices to report that, such as it was, the second-day story of the Villiers case was all

there was likely to be until, and if, something further developed. He was quite unaware that what he had started through the printed columns of the *Sentinel* that morning was rolling along on its own impetus.

As once before, Stealthy Hooker just walked around the block and returned to Bancroft's office. He went right in, closed the door after him, released the inside snap-bolt lock, and said to the rather startled lawyer:

"Ever read a yarn called *Japhet in Search of a Father*, Bancroft?"

"No, never heard of it," said the other, pulling himself together. "You have a literary advantage of me there."

"Oh, I just happened to read it once," said Stealthy, "because Mister Hooker, the boozy old loafer who brought me up part of the ways, used to laugh over it. It was his pet book—only book I ever saw him read, in fact. It was about a boy named Japhet that was found on a doorstep 'wrapped in a yaller handkerchief.' It was the only clue there was to his parentage. In that yaller handkerchief he had an advantage over me. But I got one or two things myself of maybe a different colour. Anyway, Bancroft—I'm *Japhet*."

The lawyer did not appear greatly surprised at this statement. He gazed intently at the Tenderloin Rounder, while he drummed his large and well-manicured fingers on the desk behind which he now sat. Stealthy, on his side, kept his eyes fixed upon Bancroft's face. In those eyes, usually unnaturally bright, there was for the moment something wistful, a light no human being ever before had seen in them.

"Well?" said Bancroft.

"You know it. You've always known it," said Stealthy. "You thought I knew it, too, that day you passed me a hundred bucks. But I didn't—then."

"When *did* you know it?" asked the lawyer quietly.

"This morning—after reading the Louis Villiers yarn."

"And just what do you think you know?"

"Belle Tremaine was my mother and Louis Villiers is my old man," Stealthy plunged, although he spoke as if he made a proved or provable statement.

"Admitting, for argument's sake, you're right, what of it?"

"That," said the Tenderloin waif, his pounding heart making his voice sound thick, "is for you to say."

Bancroft drummed away on the table for fully fifteen seconds. He looked up at Hooker with a kind of sympathy.

"You're making a quite accurate statement," said he. "You will also have gathered indirectly from the *Sentinel* story, also an accurate statement, that although Villiers Smythe is your half brother, you, unhappily, were born on the wrong side of the fence, so to speak. It isn't your fault, my boy, and you have my utmost sympathy and—and my good-will, too. You will not, of course, go and make newspaper copy of your own misfortune. For only you and I—and perhaps Mrs. Mary Villiers—know what was in old Louis's mind, or conscience, what moved him to that crazy denial of a marriage which never took place. Only you and I—and perhaps Mary Villiers—know that your father, who never at any time had a thought

of marrying your mother, paid a couple named Hooker to bring you up as their own child, or at least under their name. Afterward, I gathered from your late mother, the Hookers left New York, taking you——”

“I know all about that—from there on,” said Stealthy. “I’m not worrying about whether my mother was married or not.” The expression in his eyes somehow belied this assertion. “All I want to know is: Am I next of kin to Villiers Smythe if anything should happen to him?”

“Mmmm!” the lawyer hummed thoughtfully, almost as if this thought were startling. “There’s a point of law there—mmm. But, of course, Villiers Smythe will probably marry, in which case his widow——”

“Suppose he wasn’t married when he greased out?”

“Offhand, I do not care to say,” said Bancroft guardedly. He had pulled open a desk drawer and extracted a checkbook. As he began to fill in a blank with some writing he went on—as if his mind were dwelling on business other than the matter under discussion—“There is a possibility that, if it could be shown that Louis Villiers and your mother lived together for any length of time and were accepted, by such as knew them during that period, as man and wife—the common law—er——”

“But why discuss that at present, Hooker—I mean, Villiers—Henry Villiers. That’s your name, by the way. If anything ever happened to your more fortunately situated half brother, and he died intestate, of course I should be glad to take up the matter in your behalf. In the meantime——” he tore out the check

which he had been filling in and handed it to a very much surprised Tenderloin Rounder. "In the meantime, here's something perhaps you can use. I feel that it's coming to you, in all human decency and fairness."

Stealthy looked at the face of the check. It was an order on a reputable bank to pay to Melville Hooker the sum of one thousand dollars.

There was no great light of satisfaction in Stealthy's eyes; only a slight sadness and still that touch of wistfulness.

"Where's this money coming from?" he asked.

"From your mother's estate."

"Thought my half brother had control of that."

"He has—absolute. I cannot check on it. But that is drawn on my own bank, my personal account. I'll arrange it with Smythe."

"You will—huh?" said Stealthy, with a return to his nighthawk manner.

"Yes, unless you prefer to ask him for money yourself. He'd simply refer you to me. And wisely. Don't try any blackmail game, Hooker. You'd lose, expose your own illegitimacy, and probably land in jail. Of course, I can't prevent your trying to squeeze money out of your father. But it'll be hard squeezing while Mary Villiers plays watchdog. As for getting more money where that came from—it depends on yourself. Attempt any coercion and you get none. Leave it to me and to what I shall tell your half brother about human love and decency, and—I shouldn't be surprised!"

Bancroft's gaze again met Hooker's squarely. To

the lawyer's wonder there was a suspicion of moisture in the Tenderloin nighthawk's eyes. His fingers were rather clumsily folding the check which he fumblingly placed in a vest pocket.

"Bancroft," said he, "you're treating me pretty white. I'm not forgettin' it. It's sorta—my own money, ain't it?"

"In a way—yes. Anyway—it's yours, my boy. I feel that you're entitled to it. And perhaps I can be of friendly assistance to you in the future. Only—don't stir up any more of this unpleasant notoriety around the name of your poor dead mother."

"Th-thanks!" gulped Hooker, who seemed all at once just ordinarily human—not an artificial product of Tenderloin's side streets.

He turned to hide his unwonted emotion, blinking up at a steel engraving on the wall. It was of Alexander Hamilton—a person of whom Stealthy had but vaguely heard. Then, with a mere nod, he went to the door; seemed at loss because he could not open it, then remembered the snap lock. He went out, softly closing the door after him.

Bancroft, left alone, stared at the desk upon which he drummed with his large and well-manicured fingers.

Chapter XXIII

AROUND THE EDGE

ALTHOUGH he had been specially assigned to unravel the skein tangled by old Louis Villiers, the apparent fruitlessness of the task saw Richard Dayton back again that night in his regular departmental job in the House of the Two Green Eyes.

Grell did not turn up at the police station that evening. But David was in no mood to concern himself over his absence.

It was a quiet night in the precinct. The only matter of interest had no news value—on its face. Stealthy Hooker confided to Dayton and the Sphinx and Sergeant M'Gonigle that he was going off on a holiday. Dayton was surprised. The Sphinx stared. The Sergeant seemed to think it a matter calling for *two* glances at the clock and *two* dips of his pen in the inkwell. Which was almost without precedent.

"If it's a fair question," said the Sphinx, taking off and polishing half of his four eyes, "what's your idea of a holiday, anyway?"

Stealthy waved a cigarette airily. "Ain't seen my folks in years. They live in Ohio. Thought I'd look 'em up."

"Never knew you *had* folks," said Hotchkiss, with marvel and a touch of respect.

"Just growed, like Topsy," Dayton contributed with a grin. "Or evolved, like the Tenderloin."

"It's reasonable to believe the fella *had* parents—at least once," the sergeant murmured just audibly, while he made entries in the blotter. "Only——" M'Gonigle gazed solemnly at the Rounder and waved an admonitory pen—"watch out for this Ohio place, Stealthy. They say there's cows an' dandelions an' such things out there. Mighty chancy things for a guy to meet that's been used to the simple life around the Tender Thirties. Don't you go around much except nights, Stealthy, when you get out to that place."

They all laughed—including Stealthy.

When Dayton went to his room at three o'clock in the morning of that day which also saw the bow of Ulysses Hooker turned westward, the *Sentinel* man discovered the missing Grell smoking. He was comparatively sober.

"Where'd you light out to about fifteen hours ago?" asked Dayton.

The other turned upon his friend a pair of eyes shot with quiet misery.

"I saw Frances," said he dully, "while you were busy with the clerk at the Hotel de Ville. Caught a glimpse of her through a window facing on Broadway. She was walking with—a friend."

Dayton sighed wearily. Was he in for another session of the old thing?

"Well—what of it?" His tone was of impatience. "You'd never guess who the fellow was."

"Too tired for guessing games. Know him yourself?"

"Didn't at first. Couldn't believe my eyes. Followed them. Hadn't time to explain. You were busy. They went to Central Park—yes—the Park. She seemed to be enjoying the outing. He was playing the usual game for all he's worth."

"How much is that? Who was he?"

"A million dollars. That ex-floorwalker—Villiers—Smythe—whatever his name is. Where she ever made his acquaintance beats me. That she should be seen with the pasty-faced night crawler made me sick. You and I know he's been painting Broadway red since he got that money. Seems now he's developing an ambition to improve his list of lady friends."

"Oh, why don't you forget it, Grell? Forget it and go back where you belong—Rochester. Haven't you had enough?"

"Dragging Frances down to the level of his Tenderloin women!" Grell muttered.

"That's rather sweeping—unfair, perhaps," said Dayton. "Anyway—he won't hold Miss Kimball's level for long if he keeps playing around with Dolly Carnation. He'll drop Dolly—watch him!—and that may not be the worst thing could happen to him."

"Dolly Carnation? Who's she when she's at home?"

"When she's at home," said Dayton, his brows knitting to a shadowy frown, "her name is Margaret O'Neill—that girl at Jefferson Market Court the day you first met Miss Kimball. Remember? The girl

the probation lady—and others—tried to save from becoming more Dolly and less Margaret."

"Oh?" said Grell, recalling the incident, the side incident of a day he could never forget. "The time you played St. George?"

"And got stung," said the newspaperman with a note that made Grell regard him curiously.

"So?" The young man from Rochester smoked in silence for nearly a minute. "I know all about that."

"About what?" Dayton's irritation was increasing.

"I went with Frances to the girl's home—one day a long, long time ago. What did you think I meant?"

"Nothing," mumbled Dayton. "I'm going to take a bath and turn in."

For more than a month Stealthy Hooker's familiar figure was absent from the Tenderloin. What he was doing, he alone knew, although Mr. Bancroft may have suspected and awaited results with interest, if little anxiety.

H. Augustus Villiers Smythe seemed presently to have mended his ways. He was much in the company of, at first, Mr. Bancroft and Miss Kimball; then, later, Miss Kimball alone. The latter had resumed her work in Jefferson Market Police Court as a lady probation officer, now drawing salary from the city. She needed that salary, everybody knew who knew anything about her finances; and none could say she was not entitled to it, considering the year or two she had served the same office without emolument.

She had an assistant, without salary, in a young man who had apparently discovered a noble use for himself

and some of the interest accruing from one million dollars inherited. Many a bank note which originally may not have had a taintless source drifted through the heir's hands into Miss Kimball's, and from hers to those of unfortunately situated persons who were in dire need of a little monetary help. Nobody questioned Miss Kimball's charity of motive (except, possibly, Richard Dayton and Oren Grell), but, on the other hand, nobody was deceived about Villiers Smythe's inspiration—except H. Augustus himself. In these days the ex-floorwalker almost shed tears of genuine self-admiration for discovered virtues which might never have come to light but for that tender inspiration, his Beautiful Lady.

How Miss Kimball may have regarded the neophyte, other than as a useful instrument in her probation work, it would have taken an expert mind reader to define. Richard Dayton saw the lady and her latest attendant occasionally of a Sunday morning in court, and he pondered much over the pair. Once Miss Kimball spoke to the reporter in that court, after making several false starts; somehow lacking courage to carry out an obvious desire. He was not surprised at the nature of what she had to say. Why should he be surprised? She must suspect that he probably knew the history of that trip to Europe. It would have been unnatural to ignore the matter.

"It was a mistake, Mr. Dayton, a dreadful, sad mistake," she said in a low voice, after making sure that her latest admirer was out of hearing. "I really thought I loved him. Sometimes I think I do still. I meant well, for Oren's sake, and I'm glad now that I

did not yield to his first urging to marry him. Now, only *I* am the loser. He will forget me. Better that he does—for his own sake, if not mine. What, by the way, is he doing?"

"Nothing that will get him anywhere, Miss Kimball," Dayton said in an impartial tone. "Becoming a Tenderloin rounder as fast as the Tenderloin can assimilate one more. I fancy he hangs on, though, in the hope that—possibly—you two—— But haven't you seen him? Hasn't he tried to see you?"

"Yes. We met again—once," she said dully. "It wasn't any use. I told him so. He more than half agreed. I wish he would go home to Rochester."

"I think he will," said Dayton. "For a while I considered writing his father. But that old gentleman doesn't seem to need any advice or information about his son. He knows all about——"

"Not *that*?" interrupted Miss Kimball, flushing and paling.

"No, not that. I'm the only outsider who knows anything about—that. And you may rest assured no other will—from me."

"Thank you," she murmured humbly, almost inaudibly, her eyes cast down.

"But Mr. Grell wrote his son," Dayton cut back. "Oren showed me the letter. The boy's getting fifty a week now until he's through. But it ended, 'Be sure you're *quite* through!'"

That was all. After this exchange Miss Kimball seemed to avoid the friend of Oren Grell. Dayton understood and did not intrude upon her—or her latest

cavalier escort—with more than a nod of courtroom recognition.

Dayton told Grell that night of his little talk with Miss Kimball.

"She hinted that you and she had talked it out," said Dayton, leaving it to the other to carry on the subject if he chose.

"Yes, we talked," said Grell with a wry smile. "She doesn't love this fellow, Smythe. She says she doesn't love me either—the way she wanted to. If you ask me, she knows no more about herself than she ever did, or is likely to know. I asked her if she was considering marrying this counter jumper. She laughed at the idea, but—well, nothing she did would surprise me any more. He's useful, and he's got money, and she says she could never love anybody as she thought she loved me. So there you are!"

Grell cynically studied the tip of his cigarette for a while. When Dayton made no comment he spoke again.

"The night we talked—it was in Morelli's again, shortly after we got back—she had a small fit of sentimental regret. Said she would give up her hopes of salvation to be like the average woman. But she doesn't trust herself. She has 'a streak.' Love is a flower. She is a bee. That sort of thing! If you ask me, Dickie, she's the kind of bee would rather eat honey than make it. And her taste in honey is subject to change. Nevertheless, she's unhappy over it. I know that much. Which is maybe why I've hung on—hoping she'd find herself. But she won't. She can't

change her spots. And jumping from bees and leopards to ostriches, just now she's again burying her head in the sands of 'sociologic interest.' A-all right! I'm about through, Dickie. Presently I may depart to become a rising young banker in Rochester, N. Y."

Which he did—about three weeks after Stealthy Hooker headed for points West.

Villiers Smythe was turning over a fresh page or two every day. He had developed an acute case of what Stealthy Hooker was wont to call "the good fever." He had dropped Dolly Carnation within twenty-four hours of his re-meeting the Beautiful Lady in "Mr. Prestcott's" apartment in Twenty-eighth Street.

Which came quite hard on Dolly Carnation. At the end of the ensuing fiscal week, despite her dimpled knees, she was dropped from the chorus of the Frivolities. It may have been that Smythe's influence and money got her into the chorus originally, and the withdrawal of the angel's interest caused a sympathetic withdrawal of the management's.

Still a week later Dayton became aware that the O'Neill girl was no longer riding the wave of prosperity.

He was in Twenty-seventh Street, east of Broadway, one evening, when he saw the girl. Bisco and Drane had pounced upon her like a pair of predatory animals. Dayton recognized all three at once, despite that they were grouped against an areaway railing in the least illumined spot between one lamp post and the next. The reporter crossed to the oppo-

site side of the street and kept on a seemingly casual course. Before he passed he saw the girl hand something from a purse to the lean and hungry Mr. Drane, who then drifted away with his partner in law enforcement, Mr. Bisco. The O'Neill girl hurried off in the opposite direction, going east, as Dayton continued, but on the other side of the street.

"Shake-down!" muttered the reporter. "It probably cost her ten. Another arrest and arraignment spell Blackwell's Island for her. They pointed that out, and probably suggested a price for occasional immunity. Of course, they've got to arrest her once in a while, actually, to keep up their reputation for street cleaning. Rotten!"

It was. But there was nothing Richard Dayton could have done to prevent what had just happened short of compelling Bisco and Drane to press a charge which would doubtless he entertained in court because of the girl's previous record there. For election purposes, the *Sphere* and the *Quirinal* made an occasional noise over some individual case like this. The *Sentinel's* policy, on the other hand, was to strike at the roots of this villainous Graft Tree. It wasted no time merely lopping off twigs. Some day, Dayton promised himself, he would get Bisco and Drane and break them—but not through this girl. For there were other Biscos and Dranes who would thereafter break *her*.

When he saw the girl turn south on an avenue, then east again on Twenty-sixth Street—a course that would take her to Bellevue Hospital or the Morgue at the street's river end—he disgustedly dismissed the incident until——

It was some nights later when the O'Neill girl—Dolly—Margaret—whatever she called herself—was brought into the House by two detectives other than Bisco and Drane. This was not according to the system's fair rules, as Bisco and Drane may have taken pains, later, to inform their too zealous confrères in the enforcement of righteous law. Except that the girl's face bore marks of dissipation and her eyes looked more like burnt holes than fern-fringed wishing wells, there was no doubt in Dayton's mind about her identity. She did not turn her eyes in the direction of Dayton, who was regarding her gloomily from the reportorial corner of the station house.

In Jefferson Market Police Court the girl, who gave a name that was neither Dolly Carnation nor Margaret O'Neill, was sentenced to thirty days in Blackwell's Island Prison, without the option of a fine. Magistrate Marlowe, identifying the girl to his own satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, inflicted merely what he felt might be a severe lesson where milder treatment had failed. On the following Sunday morning Dayton spoke about the case to Miss Kimball.

"Discouraging," said he, "to those who tried to keep her off the toboggan at the outset."

"Yes, disappointing," said the probation lady. "I wasn't in court, either, that day. Couldn't have done anything, wouldn't have tried! I had thought she was doing so well, too. I'd called at the O'Neill place just a short time before."

"Was Mr. Smythe with you?" Dayton put in rather unexpectedly.

"No, he wasn't, come to think of it," replied Miss Kimball. "Just happened not to be. Why?"

"Don't suppose he was in court, either, when Dolly Carnation was arraigned?"

"Oh!" said Miss Kimball icily. "I think I see what you mean. But"—her iciness melted and her eyes fell before Dayton's steady gaze—"don't you think it's as well to let the dead past stay dead, Mr. Dayton? Of course, I've heard rumours. But they're in the discard like lots of mistakes we all make."

"Sorry," said the reporter—and he was. "I didn't mean—— But how did you find things at the O'Neills'?"

"All sixes and sevens," she replied, glad to change the drift; "though they might have been worse. The father is drinking heavily and being arrested about once a week in one precinct or another. He'll probably be sent up, too, before long. But there seemed one ray of sunshine in the sordid business. Although the father had turned the daughter out some time before I called again—doubtless believing what now seems to be the truth about her—the mother seemed happier with only Felix on her hands. Told me in confidence, though, that Margaret was a girl more sinned against than sinning. As straight as a string, she said, and making an honest livelihood and sending a little money each week to help her mother." Miss Kimball sighed. "I'm afraid Mrs. O'Neill won't get any money from her daughter for at least thirty days. I'll have to see what can be done to help."

Mr. Smythe arrived at that moment, casting a quick, jealous glance upon the clear-eyed, brisk-appearing Mr.

Dayton, in whom he vaguely recognized one of the hated inquisitorial newspaper tribe. Miss Kimball formally introduced these two. But she did not have the courage to announce to the friend of Oren Grell a fact which other departmental reporters discovered a day or two later (among the city's latest vital statistics) and flashed to their respective newspaper offices as an interesting item. That item (appropriately expanded) appeared in all the next editions under headings which, though variously worded, conveyed the established fact that "KIMBALL'S DAUGHTER MARRIES VILLIERS HEIR!"

Many persons read the newspaper announcements of that marriage with various or mingled feelings. The Tenderloin chuckled or shrugged its blasé shoulders. Society north of Fifty-ninth Street was shocked but not surprised. Frances Kimball had long since ceased to surprise her former friends. The denizens of newspaper editorial rooms smiled once, then relegated the matter to the archives where the strange and the not-so-strange gather dust—dust, however, that can be blown off at a moment's notice. And a certain surrogate judge stuck out a dour underlip and nodded his head over that newspaper story. But, being a fair man, he had to admit to himself that J. Loudon Bancroft's motives appeared, for once, to be above suspicion.

Two persons read of the marriage with a great deal more than ordinary interest. One was Mr. Bancroft himself. He was not surprised, of course. Why should he be? He had fostered this match with almost a paternal interest. He was very pleased—very

pleased, indeed. It was all for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

The second person—Oren Grell—read the news in that *Sentinel* to which, since his return to Rochester, he was a subscriber by mail and an ardent reader of Dayton's stuff. No pleasant picture can be painted of the way he took the blow. He had hoped, had continued to hope, even in Rochester, where he occupied a desk in his father's banking house. He had it out with himself, confiding not in his worthy father, nor even pouring out his woes in a flood of ink to his David in New York. Instead, after a wakeful night, he penned a letter to Frances Villiers Smythe, née Kimball, wishing her happiness and offering his undying devotion and aid, if ever—at any time—under any circumstances—she had need of either. For, as he failed to refrain from saying at the end, he had loved once and would never love again—and would like her husband to know that!

A third person, one who might have been stirred even more profoundly by the announcement that Villiers Smythe had married an heir to his estate, and was probably anticipating a series of heirs, was Melville Hooker, the bridegroom's brother *sub rosa*.

But Stealthy was not in the least disturbed; for he failed to read, or hear, of the marriage until some time after it had taken place.

Chapter XXIV

SHUFFLE AND DEAL AGAIN!

LESS than three months after the return of Oren Grell to Rochester, where a generous father believed his son was now making an earnest endeavour to pull in life's harness, Stealthy Hooker, getting back to his native Tenderloin, reëstablished his worth to the *Morning Lark* by securing a tale of midnight frolic which was rich in *Lark* spice. It had, too, other elements which led to its copying by the regulars in their later editions. And the *Sentinel* next day editorially drew the matter of that tale to the attention of the District Attorney of New York for action in behalf of the city's fair name for decency in its private citizenry.

Briefly, the story unearthed by Stealthy, done into *Lark*-ian English by a rewrite man on the Rialto organ's staff and dished up for the delectation of Broadway, was that H. Augustus Villiers Smythe, heir to—etc., etc.,—who had been married to the former Frances Kimball, daughter of—etc., etc.,—was no longer living with his bride of little more than two months. Furthermore, Villiers Smythe had celebrated a sort of return to comparative bachelor freedom by giving a little private dinner party to select friends of his pre-nuptial days. At this dinner, which was washed down with floods of champagne and attended by per-

sons "whose names" (*vide Sentinel* editorial) were "a byword of opprobrium and scorn," had had for its climax the emergence from a huge artificial pie of a maiden less than diaphanously clad, who had thereafter provided entertainment by dancing *au naturel* on the table to the sweet strains of Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." The name of the nymph was given as Dolly Carnation, a former close friend of the artistically minded host, "and who," as the *Lark* remarked, had recently been released from Blackwell's Island after serving thirty days for "behaviour considered by Magistrate Marlowe as more or less reprehensible in a city of puritanic principles."

Stealthy may have taken a certain malicious delight in uncovering this entertaining bit of scandal. And he may have derived some personal satisfaction, less from the stir it made than the trouble it begat his more fortunately born half brother. That trouble was enough, forsooth, although in the end District Attorney Jerrold, despite the outcries of Anthony Comstock, of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, decided that the attendant publicity had been punishment enough and dismissed the matter and everybody concerned after he had grilled Dolly Carnation, Villiers Smythe, and the latter's guests, individually and collectively.

So the matter failed of Stealthy's half purpose. Although, at the height of the stir, Frances Kimball Smythe threatened immediate suit for divorce, she did not file one, then or thereafter. While J. Loudon Bancroft sympathized and did not deny her full justification for such action, he strongly opposed any divorce plan. Doubtless, as he pointed out to her, a divorce

would be welcomed by Villiers Smythe, who had tried to cover his moral shortcomings as a husband and a man by blaming what he called his bride's highbrow attitude since the very first evening of their marriage. But if divorce was what Villiers Smythe would welcome, so that he could buy his freedom with alimony and divert the rest of his fortune—say, by remarriage in another state and heirs by a second wife—Bancroft was of the opinion that Frances should hold him fast; unless, of course, she wished to marry anyone else. Which she assured him with a shudder she certainly did not!

"You're the only man, Jim, I seem able to lean on, to feel that you're always behind me like a rock."

"You might do worse, Frances," said Bancroft with a friendly chuckle.

"I might," she agreed, "but you're too precious as a friend."

Which seemed to satisfy Mr. Bancroft, to judge by the paternal way he patted her hand.

The failure of Frances Kimball Smythe to sue for divorce disappointed Stealthy Hooker. Returning to New York to discover that even if illegitimate he was no longer next-of-kin to Villiers Smythe, had been in the nature of a shock to the son of Louis Villiers and Belle Tremaine. For his mission Ohio-ward—and elsewhere—had proved fruitless. He had found Mister Hooker no longer a Gentleman-Farmer-of-the-Middle-West, but running a cheap railway restaurant at Hicktown, Ohio. The Great Idea had failed, and the farm had fallen into the hands of mortgagors. And being too old a dog to learn new tricks Mister

Hooker had fallen back upon a Lesser Idea, the restaurant in which Ma Hooker was caterer, cook, head waitress and dish washer.

Stealthy Hooker had lived in, though not on, that restaurant for weeks, hoping that by patience and the steady application of beer and his reportorial arts he might draw from his former guardians the answer to the great question in the Tenderloin's nighthawk's mind. *Had* there been an unrecorded marriage between his father, Louis Villiers, and his mother, Belle Tremaine? He applied his inquisition to Mister Hooker and Ma Hooker separately and together for weeks. Always the answer was the same, or similar. There *might* have been a marriage. They did not know. But they did not think it likely. Still, there might have been, for all they knew. They had asked no questions when the baby was farmed out to them, being needful and glad of the allowance they got from old Louis Villiers for bringing up the child under their own name. Yes, they admitted that much when pinned down—Louis *was* his father. At least, they could account for his action and interest no other way.

When Stealthy got back to New York, disappointed that he was no nearer proving himself a legitimate elder son *and* heir, the fact, which he soon learned, that Villiers Smythe had taken unto him one who, if surviving her husband, would naturally inherit his money, drove the Rounder to a new line of investigation. He did not reappear in the House of the Two Green Eyes for weeks, and kept away from former haunts where his return would be hailed and bruited a-Broadway. Patiently, like a real hunter in the dark,

he pursued the new line, digging up all the contemporaries of Louis Villiers he could find alive and trying to get confirmation of his father's possible prior marriage to his mother. But such contemporaries were either as doddering as Louis himself, or they feared involvement in the unsavoury Villiers case, or they admitted, at best, that while they had accepted Louis and Belle as man and wife at the time, the precious pair might not have been married at all. Subsequent disclosures had suggested that they had not been.

Between times, Stealthy also hunted up all the surviving, but half-fossilized, marrying ministers and magistrates of the late 'seventies and early 'eighties. He tried to refresh their memory of one possible marriage among hundreds they had performed before the days of penalty for nonrecording. All his efforts were fruitless. He could not establish a single argument supporting the possibility of his legitimacy. And his last resource counted for another week wasted, hanging around the grounds of a certain private sanitarium in Rockland County until the temporary absence of Mrs. Mary Villiers, née Corbin, offered him a chance to speak with a fast-failing old hotel keeper.

What happened when he at length succeeded in getting speech with old Louis Stealthy kept to himself forever—with the exception of one occasion presently to be recorded. The interview could not have been at all satisfactory to Japhet, for promptly thereafter he took up his job again with the *Lark*, and in the first week of his return to tipster duties culled that spicy tale of diaphanous Dolly of the dimpled knees emerging from a pie, and printed it more in a spirit of grow-

ing malice against his half brother than with any definite end in view other than the making of a good *Lark* story.

When there was talk of a threatened divorce action by Mrs. Augustus H., Stealthy was thoughtful—and pleased. She might accept a lump sum in settlement and have no further claim upon the estate. When the threatened action failed to eventuate he considered the possibilities that might lie in the idea of telling Villiers Smythe about his wife's earlier visits to a certain "Mr. Prestcott's" apartment in Twenty-eighth Street. But, after much pondering, he could not see anything to be gained by such a move. Villiers Smythe had met the lady in those apartments prior to his marriage with her. Unless the heir were desperate to marry again—which would not further Stealthy's next-of-kinship—Smythe would hardly make an issue of matters which had transpired, and of which he must have been cognizant, before his marriage to "Miss Forrest" of the "Prestcott" apartment. Besides, Stealthy doubted if Villiers Smythe would care to antagonize his man of affairs by introducing the latter as a possible correspondent. And, finally, Stealthy quite dismissed the idea of Villiers Smythe himself suing for divorce after a visit to Bancroft.

"Well, what did you dig up?" asked the lawyer without preamble.

"Nothing," said Stealthy gloomily. "Looks like I'm the goat."

"I could have told you it would be a waste of time and money," said Bancroft, not unkindly. "There *was* no marriage. You have my sympathy—er—Henry,

and I have arranged with Smythe that you draw one hundred a month so long as you behave yourself. Which reminds me—was that girl-in-the-pie story yours?"

"I had a hand in it," Stealthy admitted. "I got to make a living."

"Of course. But if you don't keep that little streak of malice against your half brother under proper control it may cost you that hundred a month."

Stealthy pondered this. "Anything coming to me to date?"

"It's three months since you were in here."

Stealthy took the three hundred and departed.

Oren Grell, in Rochester, had read of the girl-in-the-pie scandal, which tale the *Quirinal* had syndicated to out-of-town papers as a Sunday section feature with really fine line illustrations of the "Spring Song" action. He had also read of a rumoured impending divorce action between Frances and Villiers Smythe. After a somewhat heated session with his father—in which Peter Grell, banker, threw up his hands and shouted, "Good Lord! I thought you were *through!*"—a chivalrous young man, who could love but once and had promised aid when—if—and under any circumstances—took train for the metropolis.

For some reason probably having to do with shrinking from unnecessary explanations, he did not look up Dayton at once. It was about a week before Richard Dayton knew that Sir Galahad was back in town. Grell went to that bachelor hotel where he had first stayed, and at once got on the trail of Frances. Having

learned some direct methods in his association with newspaper men, after only a few false starts he called up Magistrate Marlowe over the latter's residence telephone and got the address of a probation lady who, luckily, was again attached to Jefferson Market Police Court.

Her eyes were alight with welcome when, two hours later, they met by appointment near the St. Gaudens statue at the Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue entrance to Central Park. Five minutes later, in the shadows of much shrubbery, she sank tearfully into his arms, and a prolonged kiss again filled them—for the time being, at least—with the bitter-sweet drug that Eros distils.

When Dayton heard of it, the face he presented to the unexpectedly reappearing Grell gradually knitted into a frown of impatience.

"Some people are born to trouble," said the sapient young observer of the human fray. "Some have trouble thrust down their throats. Some go huntin' for it!"

Grell kept on his room at the bachelor hotel. Thereafter he saw more of Frances than of Richard Dayton, and she less of J. Loudon Bancroft than of Oren Grell. Her husband the lady never saw at all, the man of affairs issuing the unofficial alimony checks. And she took care that her occasional appointments, business or social, with Jim Bancroft did not conflict with her more frequent appointments with her former lover. In the meantime, Peter Grell had again agreed to fifty dollars

a week—which was fifty dollars *worth* in those days. The Rochester banker's parting shot had been:

"But get this straight, my son. One month of thirty-one days is my limit!"

Within thirty-one days Peter Grell himself came to New York—on a fast train.

Still mindful of past favours, Grell had not dropped Richard Dayton altogether, despite the latter's sudden lack of sympathy. The young man from Rochester occasionally dropped in of an evening at the House of the Two Green Eyes, where he renewed acquaintance with the bunch.

It was on one of these evenings that he fell afoul of Stealthy Hooker. Grell had been out to Casey's-on-the-Corner several times. It is possible that the Rounder had smoked a cigarette too many. Anyway—the subject of Villiers Smythe and his affairs came up among the reporters in the alcove corner of the station house. Stealthy, his inoffensive manner failing him for once, turned to Grell and said:

"You were sorta stuck on the Kimball dame yourself once—yes-no?"

"You will kindly keep the 'Kimball dame' off your gutter-bred tongue, Mr. Hooker," said a Sir Galahad who had been drinking.

Stealthy, at loss for an appropriate retort couched in the Cornell manner, took refuge, as the culturally handicapped often do, in the bludgeon as against the rapier.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Before you get so dam' uppish suppose you look into a certain 'Miss Forrest'

who visits a certain 'Mr. Prestcott' in a certain East Twenty-eighth Street apartment house. She looks awful like said 'Kimball dame' to me!"

Grell resorted to the bludgeon, too, at that! It was his fist. When Stealthy picked himself up from the station-house floor with a rapidly swelling eye, Grell was gone, Dayton having hustled him out to the sidewalk while an outraged Sergeant Remmers roared like a high priest whose temple had been desecrated.

"Haven't you made me enough trouble without starting a scrap in the *House*?" Dayton snapped, his patience at an end. "Beat it, Grell, and I'll be obliged if you don't come back!"

"I won't!" flamed the trouble maker.

A week later Dayton heard from an increasingly vindictive Hooker, who was still wearing a discoloured eye, that his friend Grell was "hittin' the spots where the highballs grow."

"Small thanks to you," said Dayton. "What did you mean by that fighting speech, anyway?"

"Just what I said. Not that it's any business of yours—or mine. Between you and me and the station-house cat, that Kimball dame's no better than she's got a right to be."

Dayton's eyes turned coldly upon Hooker's face. Stealthy grinned his disarming grin. "Say, Dickie!" he cried in mock alarm. "Leave me keep the other eye! I need it!"

"As you say," said Dayton slowly. He had been thinking rapidly. The lady's conduct as he knew some

of it himself did not encourage much defence. "As you say—it's none of your business—or mine."

"Now you're talkin'. Though I'm maybe sorry I spilled that on Grell. He called me with that high-brow stuff I couldn't raise on. But I'm bettin' it done him good. Prob'ly he's been lookin' into what I hinted an' find there's somethin' to it. In fact, I *know* he has."

"How?"

"She's around with Bancroft a lot again. Grell seems to be in the discard once more. He's hittin' the highballs like they were his morning dozen. And, get this! It's funny! Him an' Villiers Smythe meets in Mouquin's the other night and stages a scrap before they're both thrown out. I happen to be there—in the background. I slip out to see if they'll go another round on the sidewalk. What d'y' suppose? They quit fightin'. They're both lit to the gills and are sorta explainin' somethin' an' weepin'—yes, sir!—weepin' drunk! 'She played me for a sucker!' weeps Smythe. 'Looks like we're both suckers!' weeps Grell. 'Here's hopin' she plays *him* for a sucker!' weeps Wealthy Willie, 'but 'tain't likely—not *him*!' Then—darned if they don't go staggerin' off, arm in arm, lookin' like a pair of suckers that's sucked in as much as they can hold!"

Chapter XXV

ANGEL OF MERCY

IN Grell's brain the poisonous seed sown by Stealthy Hooker had sprouted and flourished. He had discovered how, and with whom, and *where* occasionally, Frances spent the evenings that she did not devote to him.

That was when he began to drink recklessly and wander the streets alone at all hours of the day and night, always alone, always drinking. He did not feel that he could turn to Dayton; had no inclination to do so.

On the night which saw the beginning of the end he was drifting aimlessly through the Tenderloin. It was night in the sense of Tenderloin night. It might have been late in the evening or well on toward morning; he was in no condition to know or care. As a matter of fact, it was within an hour of dawn, as he might have judged from the appearance of the street-cleaning department's White Wings with their brooms and little carts, and the occasional clanging progress of milk wagons. Grell, a ship rudderless but not quite derelict, was vaguely debating with himself whether he would start for Rochester to-morrow—or next day—or have another drink so that he might debate the point further with a clearer mind.

He had been trying this clearing method for days—many days and nights—while deadening his mind to forgetfulness of how and why he had brought himself to this sodden, poisoned condition.

Through a mist—it was somewhere on Broadway, or near it—it didn't matter—he became aware that a man in rather dishevelled evening dress and a girl who swayed on the man's arm were laughing at him.

"H'lo, Smythe! Have drink?" said Grell, recognizing the man and feeling all at once a need for cheer and human company of some sort—any sort.

Then he thought he recognized the girl, Smythe's girl, of course—Dolly Carnation. But subconscious memory, which so strangely comes uppermost in intoxication, prompted his tongue to the greeting:

"How 'do, Miss 'Neill! Had the pleasure—once——"

"Oh, he's soused! Let's shake him, Harry!" said the girl, getting into a waiting cab and almost dragging Smythe in after her.

"Shorry, ol' shap!" Smythe hiccoughed, subsiding into the cab seat. "Got 'n 'gagement."

The cabman drove off. The rudderless ship continued an irregular course unnoted by its dazed captain. It might have been an hour, or a few minutes, later—about thirty minutes, Grell afterward had reason to believe—when a gentle hand fell upon his arm and a soft voice said:

"You are Mr. Grell, aren't you?—Mr. Dayton's friend?"

There was something about the incident that temporarily roused the young man from his stupor. He

was looking into the face of a girl he could have sworn he had seen some little time before in another place. Then she had been plainly as drunk as her escort, and—and—— *This* girl was dressed differently, in a long raincoat-like thing with the collar turned up. She wore a funny little cap like a—like a parlourmaid's. Her face, as he saw it by the radiance of the corner street lamp, was not flushed with liquor or touched with rouge. It was pale, a little strained and weary, but the eyes, liquid, inquiring, solicitous blue eyes with long, fringing lashes, were not those of a girl who would look at a worm like Smythe, anyway! Of course, he knew who she was, and what she was, but it was as a friend of a friend she had addressed him.

"H'lo!" said he dreamily. "How'd you get here? I mean—you're Dolly—Miss 'Neill—Marg'ret eh? Say—I'm—I'm awful drunk."

"I'm afraid you are, Mr. Grell," said the soft voice. "Please come with me. I'll take care of you until I can get Mr. Dayton."

"Ne' min' him!" said Grell belligerently. Then, the flare dying down—"Jus' you an' me, Dolly—huh? Don't figure out, though—same girl—two places."

He was looking up, solemnly focussing one eye on the street markings adorning the corner lamp post. They placed the location as "E. 26th St." and "Ave. A." Avenue A! He had heard of it, but had never been so far east in all his metropolitan career.

"'Belle of Av'nue A'—huh?"

"Anything you say, Mr. Grell. But please come with me."

"Pleasure, I 'ssure you," said the gentleman from Rochester, gallantly offering an arm which she gripped to steady him.

He suffered her to lead him where she would. The distance was not far, but as uncertain to him as the direction. The course ended in a flight of wooden steps lighted by a gas jet on a second-floor landing. Here the girl produced a key and unlocked a door, while Grell vainly tried to read a name painted on a strip of tin. Inviting the man inside, the girl lighted a gas jet in a bedroom adjoining a small kitchen. In the room was a single bed, also a sofa among its few pieces of furniture. Grell sank down on the sofa, keeled backward, and knew no more until he awoke with a throbbing head and a parched throat and found that sunlight was streaming in through a window and a girl was standing near him with a tray on which were rolls, coffee, and a glass of orange juice.

The girl herself was undoubtedly the same he had seen several times in various places and under various guises. Now she was a young housekeeper in a dainty but simple, clean room, herself somehow appealing in a little apron over a modest street dress. He averted his red-shot eyes from her clear blue gaze with a groan of shame and horror. Behind his momentarily tight-closed lids he beheld fireworks exploding against a purple veil and a shower of stars falling into dizzy depths.

"Dolly—Miss Carnation!" he almost cried, sud-

denly possessed with the fear of betraying his sudden panic.

"That is not my name," she said quietly, as she set the tray on a chair by the sofa. "My name is O'Neill—Margaret O'Neill."

"All right, Margaret. My good angel by any name. Well, Margaret, I'm down and out. I mean . . ."

Again the Fear swept over him, making his nerves fairly crawl and filling him with a desire to escape, escape anywhere away from this intangible Horror.

"Take care of me, won't you?" he whispered, not surprised to find that his head was pressed against her knees, around which, as she stood by him, he had flung his arms.

"Drink this coffee, Mr. Grell. Then—yes—I'll take care of you. Drink this while I—get ready."

He drank the coffee, and more when she poured it. He drank the orange juice but did not touch the rolls. Presently, as he lay with his eyes closed, fighting to control the wild racing of his brain, he felt soft fingers rolling back his shirt sleeve. Something icily cold and wet touched his forearm, followed by an almost imperceptible prick.

"What's that?" he muttered.

"Never mind, Mr. Grell. Sleep if you can."

And he did, presently, after the creeping Fear had given place to a stealing sense of Calm.

It was about nine o'clock that morning when Dayton got out of bed with a growl of disgust. The telephone in his sitting room was ringing. Usually

this meant but one thing—an emergency call from the *Sentinel*. But it was not the *Sentinel*. No story had broken that called for encroaching upon his hours of sleep. A woman's voice over the wire was soft and touched with a somehow familiar broadening of certain vowels.

"Mr. Dayton," said the voice. "Your friend, Mr. Grell, is ill, quite ill, I'm afraid. Will you please come to—" she gave an address well over in East Twenty-sixth Street—"and inquire for Miss Chester, Miss Rose Chester."

The woman spoke as if there could be no question that Mr. Dayton would come.

"I can really be of any help?" he asked, scowling at the telephone instrument. "You see——"

"I don't know of anyone else," she interrupted, "who *can* be—as things are."

"A-all right," he sighed. "I'll be there in—say, forty-five minutes."

He arrived on time. He found the name, "Miss Rose Chester," on a tin strip by a door on the second floor of a house too far east of Broadway to be of any distinct class with which he was familiar. It seemed to be a rooming house of some sort—a new sort even to the reporter. Nearly every door facing its halls had a little tin strip and a name which invariably had the titular "Miss."

"Dressmakers?" he speculated. "Poor but respectable, anyway."

Then he stood, staring, when the door at which he had knocked was quietly opened and a girl with a finger on her lips faced him, looking gravely at

him out of a pair of blue eyes. She had on a sort of ulster or raincoat, buttoned up to her neck, and seemed as if ready to go out to the streets.

"Oh? It's you!" said he, recovering from his surprise. "So, it's 'Miss Rose Chester' here?"

"Yes, for convenience and refuge," she said. "But I'm Margaret O'Neill, if that's what you mean."

"All right, Miss Chester. What have you done with—or to—my friend, Grell? How did he get here? What's the trouble now?"

"You probably can explain that last better than I," said she. "Please come in. But be very quiet. He'd better sleep as long as he can."

She led Dayton almost on tiptoe into the bedroom, where his eyes fell first upon the flushed and slightly bloated face of a once refined and clear-skinned youth who had come from Rochester to "buy a ham and see life." Swiftly the reporter's gaze flashed about the room: the bed which had not been slept in, the cheap dressing table from which the perfumes, powders, and gew-gaws he had expected to see were absent. The window was open to admit the morning air and the rare winter sunlight. It was none too warm in that room. Perhaps that was why she wore the buttoned-up ulster. Still—the situation conveyed only one thing to him at the moment.

"Where'd you pick him up, Dolly? And when? Been here all night, I suppose?"

"I see I must explain something, if you are to be of any help at all," she said, drawing in an underlip which had momentarily quivered. "You think I am

the girl you know as Dolly Carnation. I am not. I am Margaret O'Neill."

"Well, you've been arrested for street-walking, haven't you?" He asked it with brutal determination to have this point settled.

"Yes—several times—and I may be again."

"Didn't Bisco and Drake shake you down, too, without arresting you?"

"They did, once, and may do so again."

"Didn't you do thirty days on Blackwell's last month?"

"I did not."

"Then, of course, you never danced naked on a table at a certain bachelor dinner?"

Her face burned, but the "No!" fell from her lips like a cutting icicle.

"Then *who* did those thirty days, and emerged from a pie?"

"Dolly Carnation!"

"Who's she—if you aren't?"

"She's my sister, Mr. Dayton. I thought, perhaps, you knew that," was her quiet answer, as if, having made her decision to be quite frank with this young newspaperman, she was prepared to go the whole way.

"Knew it—I?" he stammered, while at the same time the engine of his heart, suddenly unburdened, began to race. "How should I have known it? It was of no special interest to me—news interest, I mean. And I saw your several identities only one at a time."

"Not that it matters," said Margaret; "does not help—your friend. Coming off duty, coming home

about four-thirty this morning, I found him wandering in East Twenty-sixth Street. It was plain to me that if someone else did not take him in tow the police would. I brought him here, recognizing him as a friend of yours. I got your number through the *Sentinel* and called you in. It was the least I could do for your friend in return for something you once did to help me."

The man on the sofa stirred, half opened his eyes, and his lips moved.

"Good ol' Dolly," he muttered. "Marg'ret, I mean. Nice li'l' girl. Dam' outrage!"

Grell turned over and went to sleep again. The voices had only half awakened him. Margaret beckoned Dayton into the little kitchen.

"Better let him sleep it out," she whispered, closing the intervening door after them. "I just wanted to know if you could stay here with him between twelve noon and about eight to-night? You see, he ought to be watched; and they've changed my hours. I mean, I'm engaged until seven-thirty. Then, from about eight, I can be here for the night, relieving you. I was on night duty—— But perhaps I should explain about that, too, though it may not interest you."

"Won't it?" said Dayton, with an unexpected warm eagerness. "I won't be happy, Margaret O'Neill, until I've heard all about it—about yourself and—and—so I can decide how many times to kick myself."

"Yes, Mr. Dayton, I'll tell you. I see there is no sense in keeping it secret any more—from you, at least; no sense in sacrificing anyone's respect for me

that I wanted to have or keep. It won't hurt Jennie any more than she's already hurt herself, and—and—I have my own life to live, after all. Haven't I, Mr. Dayton?" she asked wistfully.

"God knows I begin to suspect you have it to live in double measure from now on. Oh, Margaret O'Neill!" he broke off with a curious high elation. "I've spoken to you only twice in my life, I think, and it has worried me more than I can explain that I made a mistake, or thought I made a mistake. You don't have to tell me the mistake I made. I see it in your eyes and in what you've done for my friend. But just tell me, so I can rub it into myself a bit harder. Hand out the bitter stuff!"

They were twin sisters, Jennie and Margaret O'Neill; as alike physically as two peas of the same pod, but as unlike in all else as gold and common clay.

For a time they were as happy as Irish-American girls know how to be. Felix, the father, made good money as a teamster and was a kindly, rough, lovable father until he became a member of some political organization and came home from every one of its argumentative meetings still argumentative and very drunk.

His drinking became a habit aggravated to a crisis with every payday and to a catastrophe with every election. Mrs. O'Neill eked out the family exchequer by taking in washing and mending for the neighbours. Margaret helped at home, while the livelier, less retiring Jennie got a job in Heinemann's Universal

Department Store. Things went along not so badly for a year or two, with money coming in from three sources. Then Jennie took to going out evenings and, later, staying out nights.

It was Margaret who found out where and with whom her sister spent those nights out. There came that occasion when Margaret, appealing to the man where appeal to the sister had failed, kept Jennie's appointment with Smythe, the floorwalker, after Kate O'Neill had adopted the drastic measures of locking Margaret's almost double in her room.

At this point Dayton interrupted. He did not consider it worth while to establish which, in this and that arrest or this and that appearance in the Tenderloin, was Margaret and which Jennie—or "Dolly Carnation," as the latter called herself later. Only—why had Margaret submitted to continued martyrdom for a worthless sister after that first accident of arrest by Bisco and Drane?

"I didn't lay myself out deliberately to be arrested," said Margaret. "It just happened every so often, because strangers never could tell us apart. And I went through with it because—well, I couldn't help myself very well, and Dad believed, like the police, and others, that I was no good after that first trouble, and Mother and I thought we might shame Jennie into behaving herself before Dad found out that I was suffering for my sister's doings. But presently Jennie never even came home at all. Dad, who was drinking terribly just then, blamed me all the more. It was my example, he said, had made my sister go wrong, or driven her away from home

because she was ashamed of it. In the end he made it impossible for me to live in it—practically turned me out.”

“Good God!” muttered Dayton. “Why didn’t you tell him *then*?”

“What use? Mother tried to, but he said it was a cooked-up story to cover me. And he was always too drunk to argue with, anyway. It was better for everybody that I left, although I still had trouble with the police and had to pay the plain-clothes men to save myself from further arrest—which would cost me the job I got so I could help Mother.”

Dayton’s mind flashed back to something a probation lady had said about Mrs. O’Neill being happier with only Felix on her hands and Margaret making an honest living and sending money home.

“Just so I’ll know how coarse a hair shirt I’ve got to wear, Margaret—tell me!” said he, regarding her with eyes curiously wide and bright. “What *do* you work at?”

She hesitated, as if she would not hurt him unnecessarily, or seem to appear vain of herself. Then a little smile of amusement touched with mischief flickered about her mouth corners. But the smile died before the intensity of his eyes. She raised her chin proudly and her fingers slowly unbuttoned the ulster, or raincoat—whatever the covering garment was. Below it appeared some sort of uniform.

“Bellevue,” she said. “I’m not a graduate nurse—but soon—I hope. Why! What’s wrong, Mr. Dayton?”

For Richard Dayton, hardened metropolitan po-

lice reporter, was standing there staring at the practical nurse's uniform as if it had been a robe of samite. His eyes, bright with a moisture of which he was unashamed, or unaware, moved slowly up to her face. He looked into the frank, but for the moment solicitous, blue eyes of this girl. He was crushed to earth for what he had thought she was; staggered by what she really was.

His right hand stole out from his side and captured her left hand. And like the gallant gentleman he was under his matter-of-fact exterior, he bent over that little hand of mercy and touched it with his lips.

"*That*," said he huskily, "is what I think of you—Margaret O'Neill."

Chapter XXVI

THE SHOT!

After Margaret had left for Bellevue Hospital where, it appeared, she had an unenviable job in Ward 32, Dayton moved restlessly about the little room-and-kitchen in that house which, he now perceived, was almost wholly tenanted by nurse employees of the great institution at the foot of Twenty-sixth Street, by the East River.

The revelation of Margaret's character and her self-immolation had profoundly stirred him. The interest he had taken in this girl since the first time he had consciously observed her in Jefferson Market Police Court now returned in a new light.

The man on the sofa opened his eyes. He groaned as he realized where he was, and how, probably, he had come to be in his present situation.

"So there you are!" Dayton snarled. "The guy who, starting out as a fool Sir Galahad, went to the other extreme and proved to his own satisfaction that no woman is any good! Do you happen to know who brought you here, you damned whisky keg?"

"Where's Dolly?" Grell muttered confusedly.

"Dolly!" Dayton almost shouted. "Damn your eyes, Grell! If you call that girl 'Dolly Carnation'

I'll thrash you sober! Why, you selfcentred, one-idea'd, wilted weeping willow . . ."

And Dayton went off with both barrels at full cock, telling Grell some truths and treating him to a general raking fore and aft; which raking the reporter's conscience told him he equally deserved himself. Grell seemed little touched by the tirade. Nothing could touch him just then. He was at the bottom of the pit. Also, the narcotic hypodermic a certain nurse in practical training had administered some hours before still hung upon his senses.

"Yes, I remember now—at a street corner," he said dully. "Knew there was a mistake somewhere—drunk as I was. When is she coming back?"

"About eight this evening," said Dayton. It was then only about two in the afternoon. "In the meantime, I've got to nurse you, *dry* nurse you until she gets back, neglecting my own business at the rate of seven dollars a column!"

He had already telephoned the *Sentinel* informing the day city editor that he had some family business on his hands, but would report on the Tenderloin job as usual at the usual time. That was, as a general thing, around 7:30 p. m. He had told Margaret that. Of course, if it seemed necessary, he could wait the extra half hour until eight o'clock, when she should be back from the hospital.

Several times Dayton left his patient; going out that once to telephone the *Sentinel*; then again for early afternoon papers in which he found no special news to trouble his conscience about taking the day off. A third time he went out for a bite at a near-by

restaurant, and a fourth for a pint of whiskey at a corner saloon.

"Have a drink, Grell," said he, late in the afternoon, appearing by the patient's side with a glass into which he had poured a medicinal ounce of liquor before hiding the bottle. Grell shuddered and turned his head away.

"Don't be an idiot!" said his friend. "I know your tummy is in rebellion along with your soul, but you've been hitting it up pretty steady. You can't cut it like that. It isn't safe. I've seen better men than you——"

But Grell was indifferently stubborn. He said he did not feel the need of liquor. Felt very well, in fact; quiet, relaxed.

"Watch you don't get too damned relaxed. It sometimes runs that way. Calm before the blow-up."

"I'm all right," reiterated Grell. And presently he seemed to prove it by turning over and falling into a sound sleep. He was still sleeping at 7:00 P. M. Dayton, noting the time, felt that it would be safe to leave. Margaret would be back at eight; perhaps before. She came off duty at seven-thirty. It was only a few minutes walk from Bellevue Hospital. He scribbled a note with a pencil and left the message on the kitchen dresser. Also, he left a stiff drink on the chair by Grell's side.

Then the reporter walked to Twenty-third Street, caught a car to Broadway, transferred at that point to another northbound; reported himself (via the shack dwellers' telephone) on duty at the House of the Two Green Eyes a few minutes after seven-thirty.

—and was immediately sent out on some story detail.

He had scarcely left Margaret's room-and-kitchen when Grell awoke with a start and sat bolt upright, staring about him as if he had been awakened by an earthquake or something equally alarming. Instantly he realized that he was *alone*. With that realization the Fear that had crawled over his nerves earlier in the day returned and seized him as with claws.

He got up from the sofa, standing on feet that oddly seemed to bear no weight of his body. He had a curious sensation of being physically and psychically disconnected. Something was wrong with him, or something was about to go wrong. He glanced wildly about the room in search of his hat and coat. He discovered both and put them on with nervous haste. Then he saw the emergency drink Dayton had left on the chair. He gulped it down, making a wry face as his whole being revolted against the stuff. It quieted him a little, but not swiftly enough. There must be a bottle somewhere. Not that he wished to drink more than he felt was needed to drive off this Terror, but—anything was better than that!

He explored the place; found the kitchen—and a pencilled note which he read because he thought Dayton might have left it for him.

7 P. M. He seems all right (the note read). Has been asleep for hours. Taking a chance he'll keep that way. You'll find whisky in kitchen cupboard. He may need it. Have to go on the job myself. Will call you up later. My number is Gramercy—
R. D.

Grell looked into the cupboard and found the pint-flask. He was about to drink, when pride prompted him to replace the cork and put the pint back where he had found it. He would go out and buy his own drink.

He did. When Margaret returned at about seven-fifty o'clock she found Dayton's note and a pint of whiskey with one drink out of it. But no Grell.

A troubled look settled upon her face. She saw what had happened—the fearful awakening with which experience in similar cases in Ward 32 had made her familiar. Grell, finding himself alone—worse than alone—had gone out. He must be found—quickly. He must not drink; at least no more than was necessary in judicious treatment. Better the hypodermic again than alcoholic overstimulation. He was at the danger point.

There was a telephone for the tenant nurses' common use in the hall. She called the number Dayton had written in the pencilled note. A Mr. McHarg answered, reporting that Mr. Dayton was out on some office assignment. Then Margaret went back to her room, swiftly changed from her nurse's uniform to street dress, and started off herself on the trail of that patient who was Mr. Dayton's friend.

After a couple of drinks at a corner bar Grell felt more like himself. At least, he thought he did. In fact, he was surprised at how well he did feel; how calm again; how clear-headed. His mind seemed to be functioning with a vividness of perception of all things. It was quite astonishing, considering what

he had been through. Only that sense of physical and psychic separation lingered curiously. He presently realized, as he walked west toward Broadway, that the city by night was a strangely beautiful thing, with its black shadows against myriad visible lights, and golden hazes from millions of hidden lights.

As a Don Quixote Grell perceived himself a failure; as a Sir Galahad something of a tragic joke. His life was wrecked, as he saw it. He did not pause to think that his father's was not. Such is the ego of insanity, even temporary.

His temporarily crazed brain, abnormally imaginative, conceived himself in that dangerous hour as an Avenger of some sort. To avenge what, and upon whom, was not very clear. But presently it became very clear—most logically clear!

The idea obsessed him. To rid the earth of a dangerous beast—a pirate upon purity—Villiers Smythe! Next—how to do it? Quite simple. Just do it! Of course, a pistol would be the surest, cleanest, and most convenient instrument. And he knew where Smythe lived; he had been there with him a few nights previously, when each had bared his wounded soul to the other. Smythe would come home in a cab when he was unable to manage his legs. Perfectly simple. Wait for him and shoot as he entered the Chartres Apartments. If the girl was with him—Dolly Carnation—why—shoot her, too. Perfectly simple, although it might be as well to let her drive off, unscathed, on account of the cabman—poor but honest chap, probably—with a wife and children. One must be considerate.

Grell continued his wanderings. Outwardly he seemed a preternaturally calm young man who had perhaps had a drink or two, which was his right as a free-born citizen. Licensed saloons were not in business to sell morality tracts. Neither was Davinski, the Seventh Avenue pawnbroker who sold the young man a .32 calibre revolver and a box of cartridges, although Grell solemnly informed said Davinski that he was about to commit one or two murders. Davinski grinned and said jocularly: "Vell, you got fifty ca'tridgeses in the box, an' with not so vorse as a shooter you maybe make a clean-up—no? Only, don't go an' hand the revolver to a cop after you killed ya'self an' maybe a dozen or two besides an' tell him you did bought it from Davinski—un'erstand?"

With the pistol, which he had taken grave pains to load, in his coat pocket, Grell moved on, his body working mechanically, his mind a blank except for that single fixed idea and purpose upon the discharge of which depended the continued well-being of heaven and earth. Once or twice he suffered a certain confusion of mind as to his exact whereabouts, also sudden panicky returns of that indefinable Fear which had started him on this strange adventure. Such discomforting symptoms sent him hurriedly to the nearest bar.

Some time later he saw a face under a blue helmet regarding him with a half grin. It was the face of Policeman Phidias, a Greco-American sculptor of tombstones before he joined the force, and, incident-

ally, the hero of Dayton's "Classic Cop" stories in the *Sentinel's* Sunday issue.

"Say!" he exclaimed, recognizing Grell as Dayton's friend. "Where'd ya pick up the bun? Come on in where you can sleep it off."

"What!" muttered Grell. "Are you arresting me?"

"Naw! What'd I do that for? I'm takin' you into Casey's back room. You got to keep off the street or the roundsman 'll have me up for neglect o' dooty."

In the back room of Casey's-on-the-Corner, luckily deserted, Grell actually did sleep for an hour. When he awoke, he had forgotten all about his decision to rid the world of Villiers Smythe. His mind was again too preoccupied with that recurrent Fear. It drove him from the back room to the bar, where the presiding genius prescribed—in all innocence and with the best of intentions—an absinthe frappé. Grell presently felt better, especially after being assured by the dispenser that two absinthes were all right—though "two's enough." He had the other. About the same time, discovering a revolver in his coat pocket, he remembered and perceived again that his reasons for buying that weapon were perfectly sound and logical. He told the bartender so, and asked his opinion about the whole matter as it applied to Villiers Smythe.

"Here!" said the bartender, who was glad that it was a dull night and there was no other patron in the bar at the moment. "You put that gun in yer pocket and git out! We're runnin' a dacent place,

an' I'm listenin' to no killin' talk around here. Git out before I come around and throw ye out!"

Grell went, marvelling at the bartender's blindness to the merits of a perfectly logical matter.

He had no sooner left Casey's bar than Stealthy Hooker happened to drift in there for a little snifter. The bartender, Tim O'Brien, was still in high dudgeon and told Stealthy why. The *Lark's* nighthawk grinned.

"Who's he gonna slew?—the Czar?—or just some ordinary guy?"

"Seems to have it in for our millionaire friend, Smythe," said Tim. "Of course, he was talkin' through his hat. I tried to sober him up with a couple of absinthe frappies, but—we're runnin' a dacent place here!"

"Where'd he go from here?" asked the Rounder.

"Search me. But he won't go far with the load he was carryin'."

"Maybe," said Stealthy thoughtfully. "But you never can tell what a fella in that shape may do. You see, he was sweet on Villiers Smythe's wife—an' there's been trouble since."

"I don't want to hear nuthin' about it!" cried Tim, who was what every bartender was in his day and generation—a diplomat.

Policeman Phidias, elsewhere on his beat, was surprised presently, and far from pleased, to note that the man he had stowed in Casey's back room was again at large. Grell seemed to be navigating with some difficulty. At this moment he was swaying un-

der a lamp post on the opposite corner, apparently trying to read the street markers which placed his immediate whereabouts as Sixth Avenue and West Twenty-ninth Street.

The Classic Cop was distressed. He ought to take this intoxic around to the House. Grell was in no shape to be abroad in the public streets. Some less well-disposed patrolman might get him. But this fellow was Dayton's friend, and Dayton was the Classic Cop's friend; and the quality of such friendship is not strained. Policeman Phidias, was therefore relieved when he saw Stealthy Hooker of the *Lark* come along, engage Grell in conversation for a few minutes, take the inebriate by the arm, and lead him off eastward.

"Fine!" said Phidias to himself. "Hooker'll take care of him—one o' the bunch, even if he *is* wearin' the remains o' a beefsteak eye that same fella handed him. Saves me dirty work, anyway."

Yet it was apparent less than an hour later that Hooker, too, had failed to keep the inebriate off the streets. Phidias, still patrolling his beat shortly before midnight, at which time he would be relieved, saw Grell again, this time in tow with—or being towed by—a girl in whom the Classic Cop recognized a regular who had been arrested once or twice by Bisco and Drane. Grell now looked even worse for wear and tear. His necktie had come undone and his hat, a somewhat collegiate felt, looked as if it had been recovered after being run over by a street car. The girl was quietly coaxing, urging him to ac-

company her, which he was doing like a man in a trance.

"That's all right!" muttered Phidias. "She'll clean him out of every cent he's got, but at least she'll keep him off the street for the rest of the night."

He watched them for a few moments. He saw the girl hail a cab about a block away and assist her charge into it, getting in herself. The cab went off eastward.

Two minutes later Phidias turned sharply on his beat when he heard a swift clacking of heavy feet on pavement. Detectives Bisco and Drane, followed by several reporters from the House of the Two Green Eyes, were coming on the run toward the corner of Sixth Avenue and Twenty-ninth Street. Dayton was not among the reporters.

"What's broke?" asked Phidias, as the plain-clothes partners in the suppression of crime lumbered past.

"Shootin' case," panted Mr. Drane.

"At the Chartres Apartments!" gasped the stouter Mr. Bisco.

"That guy, Villiers Smythel!" Batty McHarg added as the runners went around the corner and headed east. "Plugged as he stepped out of a cab!"

Chapter XXVII

THE NET!

Dayton was delayed on another detail assignment which had nothing to do with the House of the Two Green Eyes.

He had been back to the House from that earlier detail about ten o'clock, cleaned up the news of minor happenings, and reported them to the *Sentinel*. Batty had also informed him that "some girl called you up on the 'phone about eight." Dayton surmised that that girl was Margaret. He, in turn, called the nurses' rooming house and was informed—by the landlady or one of the nurse-tenants—that "Miss Chester" was not in. This struck Dayton as queer. He wished to ask if the woman on the wire meant that *no one* answered a knock on Miss Chester's door. But that question might have called for one in return: "If Miss Chester does not answer, *who else* might be expected to?" He thanked the woman and disconnected.

The matter worried him not a little. If Margaret was out, or had not returned, then Grell was alone, or he, too, was out! Dayton was about to arrange with Batty McHarg to cover, while he himself took a run over to East Twenty-sixth Street, when the *Sentinel* called again and ordered him to pick up the

loose end of that other main-office story. This took the reporter to West Seventeenth Street. There he was delayed by the person he sought happening to be at a theatre and not getting back to his residence until shortly before midnight. A few minutes after that Dayton turned in the detail over the nearest telephone and was told by the N. C. E. to "jump back to the Tenderloin station—right away! Somebody has shot and killed that Villiers heir! We've sent Barrie to cover the House until you get there and a couple of other men to clean up the surface facts for the first edition."

Villiers Smythe shot and killed! Instantly Dayton dismissed Grell, Margaret, and everything else from his mind. The old story had broken loose again!

Who had done it?—and why? His reportorial mind was full of interrogation points as he made for the station house in the fastest time of which foot-work and an Eight Avenue street car were capable. Of course, speculation was useless just then. Smythe might just have invited trouble in some drunken brawl. The shooting might have no direct connection with the old Villiers mystery.

He arrived at the House just as the midnight platoon was filing out. It had been dismissed without the Czar's usual oration. Captain Murney had his hands fuller than his mouth that night. M'Gonigle had just taken the desk, relieving Houlahan, one of the four sergeants (including Remmers) who presided over each twenty-four hours of the Tenderloin day and night. The station house seemed curiously deserted and silent. There was not a reporter visi-

ble. Even the substitute, Barrie, was momentarily elsewhere.

"That you, Dickie?" said M'Gonigle, looking up quickly from his blotter. "Glad you're back. There's a big story broke loose."

"So I hear. Villiers Smythe. When'd it happen? Where? Who did it? What's doing to date?"

"Easy, boy. You've been taken care of. Your office sent several men. Nothin's known yet. Just the report. The bunch is out cleanin' up. They'll be back here in a few minutes an' you'll get all they got. Here's somebody now."

The door was swung open and in walked Stealthy Hooker, looking somewhat grave and a little excited.

"They got Grell?" he asked quickly.

"Grell? Who's he? What you talkin' about?" asked M'Gonigle, while Dayton grabbed the Rounder's arm and said: "Grell! What *about* Grell?"

"Hate to say it, Dickie, but—it don't look good to me," was the reply.

"What d'ya mean?" put in the sergeant sharply, before Dayton could speak.

"Well—" said Stealthy—and stopped. Then—"Say! We're all good friends of his. At least, we're friends of yours, Sarge, an' Grell's a friend of ours. Don't let's go off half-cock. Let's keep this to ourselves till we know more."

"You talk an' I'll decide!" snapped M'Gonigle. "I always do my best for my friends. What d'ya *know*?"

"Well, it looks like Grell. You remember,"—with a glance at Dayton—"he used to be a bit stuck on this Kimball dame that's now Mrs. Villiers Smythe? Well,

I'm takin' a cruise along Sixth Avenue and drop into Casey's for a sniffle about eleven o'clock——"

"Wait a minute!" was Dayton's whispered interruption as footsteps sounded coming to the street door.

It was only Policeman Phidias coming off post. The Classic Cop saluted as he paused at the desk to deposit his patrolman's notebook. Then he went to the rear room where ordinarily he would change to civilian clothes and go home to bed. But he paused in the act of unbuckling his belt as he heard the words:

"Grell had been asleep in the back room an' then had a couple of absinthe frappays. He showed Tim O'Brien a gun an' said he was going to croak Villiers Smythe. Tim ordered him out. When I heard about it I figgered it might pay to go after him. I overtook Grell a block away. He was in pretty bad shape, but still had this bug about doing in Smythe. Thought I talked him out of it. He seemed just crazy drunk, anyway. I walked him over to Broadway, got him into a street car an' saw him home as far as Forty-second Street, where he lives in that bach hotel across from the Metropole. I saw him start across for the bach joint. Didn't follow. He seemed to be making it all right. I dropped in at the Metropole for a few minutes to see if there was anything doing there. Then walked back here. Stopped in at Casey's again to tell Tim I'd taken Grell to his diggin's an'—darned if Tim don't tell me he's just heard Smythe has been croaked. 'Grell musta done it!' says Tim. 'He didn't,' says I. 'Couldn'ta—unless he took a car right

back to Twenty-ninth the minute he got shook of me.' "

'What do you know about this, Dayton?" asked M'Gonigle anxiously, while in the rear room a policeman stood with his hands motionless on a half-unbuckled belt.

"It's all news to me—pretty bad news, too," said Dayton, stunned. "I haven't seen him since——He and I haven't been on the best of terms of late. My God! Grell!"

In the rear room Phidias began with apparent habitual calm to get rid of his uniform. "This," muttered the Classic Cop, "is where I'd best lay low if I don't want to be broke."

At the same time there came a sound of wheels and a shuffling of many feet. Into the House of the Two Green Eyes presently poured a small crowd made up of plain-clothes men (including Bisco and Drane), many reporters, some of whom were not the regular attachés of the House, a cabman, the girl known as Dolly Carnation, a little Japanese who had been valet to the murdered Smythe, and the hall attendant boy of the Chartres Apartments. Captain Murney, the Czar, was there, too, and he looked worried. For a moment it seemed as if the Czar was about to order the material witnesses into his private room for secret inquisition. But the groan of protest from the newspaper men had its effect.

"All right, boys!" said the Czar, anxious to placate the representatives of the public. "After all, it may save my time to have you get the outstanding facts now so I don't have to repeat them after. If anythin'

comes up I don't want printed yet, I'll say so—and the man who prints it has no further standin' in this station house! All right! You first, girl! Where'd you pick up Smythe to-night?"

Dolly Carnation was an unlovely spectacle of terror and too sudden sobriety. Tears were coursing down painted and powdered cheeks. At the outset it was clear that she had no guilty connection with the killing. She had met Smythe early in the evening; had gone to a show with him; had supper and a few drinks with him at Martino's after the show; and when he got groggy—"He don't carry his liquor like he used to"—she accompanied him in a hired cab to the Chartres Apartments, which were in Twenty-ninth Street, between Fifth and Madison avenues. She had not got out of the cab herself. The driver could support her in this statement. The cabman was turning to take her back to Broadway when she heard two shots. The cab stopped, half turned in the middle of the street. Smythe was sprawling on the steps of the Chartres entrance. There was a man running down the street, eastward toward Madison. That was all Dolly Carnation knew about it, except that she and the cabby got out, and it looked like Smythe was dead, and the cabby got the hall attendant of the Chartres to telephone the police. . . .

The Czar had the cabman speak for himself. His story coincided exactly with Dolly Carnation's, except that he said both his passengers were "pickled to the eyes." Asked if he had had a good look at the man who ran away after the shooting, the cabman said, "No, it was kinda dark between the street lamps, an'

I didn't see him, anyway, until he was near the Madison Avenue corner. He was not exactly runnin', but goin' like he'd go faster if he wasn't afraid of attractin' attention by hurryin'." So far as the cabman could see, the man was a "youngish, slim-looking guy wearin' a dinky little felt hat."

The hall attendant stated that he knew nothing at all of the happening until he heard two shots, ran out, and saw Mr. Smythe lying on the steps near the basement areaway railing and the cabman and the girl getting out of the vehicle which the former had swung back to the curb.

The Japanese valet said he had been in Mr. Smythe's employ only a few weeks—since he took the apartments in the Chartres—and that of late his master had been drinking continuously. In fact, the Jap explained, with many deprecatory gestures, his employer had had to have many cocktails before he could be dressed each day, and almost invariably had to be assisted to bed when he came, or was brought, home.

That seemed to be all for the moment. In the rear room of the station house Policeman Phidias saw himself in a hole. Dayton's friend, Grell, had apparently done this shooting. It would not have been done had the Classic Cop discharged his plain duty and arrested Grell for intoxication. Only—several things challenged Policeman Phidias: particularly one thing that also puzzled Dayton and about which even Stealthy Hooker whispered comment:

"Say, Dickie, I can't figger out how Grell coulda made his get-away on a half run, soused as I last seen

him, even if he was sober enough to see or shoot straight."

This puzzled the anxious, eavesdropping Phidias as much as the fact that when he had again seen Grell, presumably *after* the shooting, he was so drunk that he could hardly keep his feet going, let alone walk hurriedly. In fact, a girl had had to help him navigate to that other cab in Sixth Avenue—in which cab they had driven off together. And *there* was a greater conundrum for Phidias which might not have been any conundrum to Richard Dayton. Not how the supposed killer had got over to Sixth Avenue, but how, if this Dolly Carnation had stayed with the first cabman at the scene of the shooting until the police arrived and brought her and the other material witnesses to the House—how could she have gone off about the same time with Grell in another cab about three blocks away?

Dayton, without knowing what Phidias had seen, was at this moment consumed with a desire to slip out and call up Margaret. It might all be a horrible mistake. Margaret might assure him that Grell had never left her room. But just then, when it seemed the press might safely scatter to the nearest telephones, Sergeant M'Gonigle felt constrained to do his duty as a police officer—and Dayton felt constrained to stay.

"One minute!" said the sergeant, pointing the end of his pen at Stealthy Hooker. "Tell the Captain just what you told me and Dayton."

Stealthy licked his lips, looked reproachfully at M'Gonigle, whose face was suddenly hard and stern, and apologetically at Dayton, whose face was white

and strained. He told, Hooker did, reluctantly, anybody could see; but he could not help himself.

"Get Tim O'Brien!" snapped the Czar before Stealthy was half through. And before the bartender was brought in, when the Rounder had completed his brief statement of seeing Grell and hearing of his murderous intention, Captain Murney looked at the *Sentinel* reporter.

"That's the fella you used to bring around, Dayton. When you see him last?"

Dayton said deliberately and with a shrug: "I haven't seen the fellow I knew as Oren Grell in several weeks. Last time he was in here he started a row; Sergeant Remmers ordered him out and I invited him to stay out. I was through with him."

The answer seemed to satisfy the Czar. But he asked Dayton if he happened to know where Grell lived in town. Dayton named the bachelor hotel near Forty-second Street—"same place Hooker says he steered him to a little while before the shooting."

"Send a man there at once, Sergeant!" commanded the Czar. A man was being dispatched in the vain hope of finding a killer resting in bed after his exercises when the bartender, Tim O'Brien, was brought in. O'Brien, seeing no advantage to himself or Casey's liquor license in concealment of anything, told a story which corroborated Hooker's statement. Tim also said (in self-defence) that he would not have served Grell a drink if he hadn't thought he was "all right."

"He'd been drinkin,'" Tim admitted, "an' been reg'larly in an' out of Casey's off an' on for days. But

he looked all right after an hour's sleep in the back room. Officer Phidias stowed him in there to sober him up."

"*Officer Phidias?* What's this?" thundered the Czar of the Tenderloin. "Have my instructions included the soberin' up of the Element so they can shoot straighter—instead of arrestin' them? Sergeant M'Gonigle, is Phidias on post or off duty?"

"Right here, Cap'n," said Phidias gloomily, appearing in civilian clothes behind the group before the sergeant's desk.

"What's this?" snarled Murney in his most righteously official voice. "Did you pick up this man Grell an' put him in Casey's back room to sober up instead of arrestin' him as an officer in uniform should?"

"I did, sir," Phidias had to admit.

"You did, did you? Maybe he told you he was aimin' to kill somebody, like he informed O'Brien an' Hooker, which maybe you thought was all the more reason for dealin' gently with him?"

"He didn't say a thing to me about shootin' anybody!" protested Phidias. "He's always seemed a decent enough sort, an' there didn't seem no sense in lockin' him up if the back room of one o' the saloons that filled him full o' booze was handy to straighten him out."

"So *that's* your idea of police dooty, is it?" sneered the Czar. "Very well, *Mister* Phidias. You're suspended an' under charges of neglect of dooty. Turn in your badge until the commissioner says ye're fit to have it back."

Again—that seemed to be all for the moment. Vil-

liers Smythe had been shot dead and all the evidence pointed to one Grell as the killer. Policeman Phidias had been suspended for failure to avert a tragedy by doing his duty at the right time. Captain Murney was in the middle of giving orders to the uniformed men to arrest Grell at sight if they saw him in the public streets, and to the plain-clothes men to "comb the precinct" until they found him, when—again the street door opened and into the House of the Two Green Eyes walked a little beady-eyed Jewish person who bowed and scraped as if anxious to place himself in good standing at the earliest possible moment.

"Now, what do *you* want?" shouted the Czar, who was in no mood to be bothered by minor complaints.

"Mister, Cap't of Po-liss," said the little Jew. "My name it is Davinski as runs a honest-to-God, straight-as-a-die pawnshop an' sale of unredeemed goods in Seventh Av'noo. If you don't believe it what I'm tellin' ask any po-liss on the beat. An' the Sergeant there, besides. My God! Ain't I a *bondsman* lotsa times a'ready?"

"What're you gettin' at? What you come in here for?" put in Sergeant M'Gonigle.

"This murder I already hear about. I'm a friend o' the po-liss—swear to God I am! What's this fella like what done the shootin'? Is it he is maybe a young fella with a leetle felt hat that talks like a gent when he ain't soused?"

After some exchanges it appeared that Mr. Davinski was offering a description fairly applicable to the suspected Grell.

"Well, what about it?" asked Murney.

"What about it? My God!—vhat a qvestion! Didn't I sold it to him that gun an' a box wit' ca'tridgesses about ten o'clock this very night? An' I think it is a fine joke he makes that he says he is goin' out to kill up a few people. My God!" wailed Mr. Davinski. "D'y' think if it is not a *joke* he makes I'd 'a' solded him——"

"That'll do!" shouted the Czar of the Tenderloin, while Dayton suddenly felt sick, very sick. "Get *Grell*, men! *Get* him! *That's* the Element we're after!"

The sleuth hounds of the law started out on the trail of their human quarry. The press hounds scattered, also, to telephone the primary facts of the case for the first editions. Dayton, when he got back from a drug store (the shack dwellers' telephone was overcrowded) found Mr. Phidias, suspended policeman, gloomily picking his teeth on the sidewalk before the House.

"Tough luck, Phidias," said Dayton. "And you did it because he was a friend of mine."

"Yep," grunted the Classic Cop. "I ain't sayin' I'd do it again if I had advance information that——Say, Dickie!"

"Say it, Phid."

"This Dolly Carnation. She got a sister?"

Dayton started and peered into the other's face upon which the green light from the station lamps fell.

"What if she has?"

"She *has*, then," said Phidias, breaking and throwing away the toothpick. "All right. I got a chance not only to wriggle out of this mess but get promoted for arrestin' Grell." And swiftly he told of the girl who took the young man away while another girl who

was almost the first girl's double remained at the scene of the shooting.

"Grell's with the sister right now, or I'm Swedish," said Phidias. "I just got to find *her* to find *him*."

"You've hit it, old man," said Dayton quietly. "But, listen. Help me out and I'll see you through with the commissioner—maybe with brass bands. Don't do a thing. Keep your mouth shut. I can turn up Grell any minute that I, or *you*, have *got* to have him."

"The hell you say!"

"You're describing it. But are you with me?"

"You got the brains, Dickie. It's all right with me—if you say so. Go to it. But hurry up so I won't have to tell the wife I'm outa work!"

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning when Bancroft got the news. It was clearly a surprise to him; something of a shock—especially when he realized that his informant over the telephone was the defunct Smythe's half brother.

"Ah!" said the lawyer. Then again—"Ah! This is—very terrible news. Er—suppose, now—suppose you come around here—no, to my regular residence—at the earliest possible moment—no!—but as soon as possible after the rest of the newspaper men are through with me. Come alone—you understand?—quite alone—and give me the details. I'll expect you."

Bancroft hung up the receiver on the hook, pushed the telephone slowly to the middle of the table in the East Twenty-eighth Street apartment where he was known as "Mr. Prestcott." He turned a face suddenly beaded with pricklings of sweat to Frances Kimball

Smythe, who had lingered for a cigarette and a cocktail after an evening to theatre and supper with her cavalier escort.

"Frances," he said in a dry voice, "you had better get out of here—be back at your own apartment at once. I—I have shocking news for you."

"*He?*" she barely whispered.

"Smythe, yes."

He broke it to her as gently as he could, tempering the blow with the reminder that she did not love the man, of course, and she would find herself amply provided for.

"But—" she gasped, white as a dead woman—"why?—who?"

"A man named Grell, it seems."

"Oren!" she screamed, springing to her feet. "It's a lie!—a mistake! I'll never believe that!"

"Ah—Oren?" said he thoughtfully, slowly, smiling oddly. "Is Grell—Oren—by any chance, the gentleman who—so suddenly came into your life?"

But she did not hear. She had slumped into the chair and appeared to be in a faint.

At about the same time Dayton was whispering into a telephone in a drug store two blocks from the House of the Two Green Eyes.

"Margaret?"

"Yes."

"Richard Dayton."

"Oh! Thank God!"

"You found him?"

"Yes. When I got back he was gone. I went out

after him when I could not reach you. Found him over in——”

“Never mind that now,” he interrupted gently. “You’ve got him—*there?*”

“Yes. I’ve given him some——He’ll be quiet for some hours to come.”

“Good! But take no chances again. Don’t let him out of your sight, or out of that room, for a second. Hit him over the head, if necessary. His liberty depends—his life, perhaps—on his being kept under cover. I’ll come the minute I can break away—about three-thirty, probably. Something’s happened. He’s badly involved. Sit tight till three-thirty.”

“Yes, Mr. Dayton.”

“Richard, if you don’t mind.”

“Yes—Richard.”

“Thank you Margaret. Hold the fort!”

Chapter XXVIII

THE HAT JUMPERS

DAYTON, after his whispered conversation over the telephone with a certain Miss Rose Chester, joined the precinct detectives, now reinforced by a special sleuths from police headquarters, at the scene of the shooting. They had the cabman and Dolly Carnation there for a little while before removing them to the house of detention, where they were presently to be held as material witnesses. The body of Smythe had been removed, by order of the coroner, to the Morgue.

At the Chartres Apartments the police went through the motions of reconstructing the crime. They had the cabman and Dolly stand here and there, and relate again when they had heard this, and where they had seen that, and what they had done thereupon. They even had the cabman drive Dolly up to the curb; discharge an imaginary third person about to be shot; then, after making a half turn of the vehicle, bring it back to the curb, etc., etc.

These were the doings mainly of the precinct men, led by Bisco and Drane. These two confided in a whisper to Dolly Carnation that if she was holding out anything it would square her with them for all time if she would come across now. But Dolly hys-

terically claimed to know no more than she had related.

But the central office guns—men from police headquarters who had long since wriggled out of uniform by virtue of higher intelligence—went at things in a less stagey manner.

It was Burrige, one of the central office men, who, deducing without undue mental strain that the murderer had "laid in wait for his victim in the areaway," spent some time there prowling about with an electric flash lamp. Burrige, who had acquired quite a reputation for sagacity in a murder case some months before, failed to discover any hoped-for clues. He did discover—with a suppressed exclamation worthy of Sherlock Holmes—that the man who had awaited in the areaway for his victim's home-coming had been a cigarette smoker.

Dayton, who was near the detective at the moment of that Sherlockian exclamation, saw Burrige carefully place in one of his vest pockets a half-smoked cigarette which he had picked up in the areaway.

"Old stuff, Burrige!" Dayton chuckled at him, "although I'm not saying it mightn't help if, say, the end is still damp and you can establish it as a brand smoked by somebody who has been around here this evening."

"Stick to reportin', kid, stick to reportin'!" said Burrige patronizingly.

"Sure—and clear up the whole business while you fellows are still 'deteckatin'!" said Dayton with a chuckle.

Still, he did not consider Burrige a fool by any

means. In fact, the reporter regretted that he had not seen that cigarette end first. Out of little things solutions of great mysteries grew. There was the case of "Ike" White, a reporter of the *World*, who found a trousers button after a bomb outrage. Maybe there was another cigarette end. It depended on how long the killer had had to wait. Burrige's find, only partly smoked, suggested not long—a smoke interrupted by Smythe's arrival. Or it might mean nothing of the sort. A nervous man, contemplating murder, might light, puff, and throw away several slightly consumed cigarettes in as many minutes. Dayton had done that himself under great stress. Once—and the memory of it worried him—he had seen Oren Grell do that same thing. . . .

Since he had charge of the Villiers Smythe case, he was recalled to the *Sentinel* office to rewrite the first edition's flash story for the regular city edition. The other two *Sentinel* men wrote and turned over their ends to him. When he got through with the whole tale it was after two in the morning. At about three he got a copy of the last edition fresh from presses that were making the tall building quiver. He also received good-night and compliments from the managing editor.

"Go home and sleep, son, and take up the assignment first thing in the morning," said the Manajed. "I've an idea we're getting to the climax of this Villiers business."

Dayton left the *Sentinel* offices, but not for his rooms and sleep. Neither did he go directly to the nurses' rooming house in East Twenty-sixth Street.

For two hours Burridge and a cigarette end had been moving at the back of his mind. There might be another. He dropped off a Broadway car at Twenty-ninth Street and walked east to the Chartres. The place seemed deserted, looking as peaceful as if a human life had not been snuffed out there under sensational circumstances several hours before.

Dayton slipped into the dark areaway. He did not burn more than half a box of matches before he found what he hardly expected to find. Another partly smoked cigarette! The unburned end of it was practically dry, but the paper looked fresh and the burned end smelled strongly of recent fire. More than that——

A half-suppressed exclamation, quite worthy of Holmes or Burridge, broke from the reporter's lips. Carefully he wrapped the end in paper and placed it in his pocketbook. He burned the rest of his matches looking for more clues, but without success.

"Puffed and threw away two—just two," he muttered. "Then Smythe came along and—he became otherwise engaged. Well, now——"

Presently Dayton, considerably elated, proceeded on foot to East Twenty-sixth Street. He went rather guiltily a-tiptoe up the wooden staircase to the second-floor landing and the door marked "Miss Rose Chester." Upon his gentle knock the door was not opened, but a voice beyond it asked:

"Who is it?"

"Richard Dayton."

Margaret admitted him. She looked very tired—strained. She had gone on night duty at the hospital

thirty-six hours before. Then a shift of hours had placed her on day duty from noon until seven-thirty on the next (the previous) day. Between times—and since—there had been no rest.

In the bedroom Dayton saw Grell looking as if he had never left that sofa. He was asleep, or unconscious from the narcotic Margaret had again administered.

"So far—good!" Dayton commended. Then his eyes fell upon something that looked not so good. Two things—on the cheap dressing table. One was a somewhat collegiate felt hat, much the worse for abusive treatment. It looked as if it had been run over by the flanged wheels of a street car. It was creased, cracked, and nicked. The other thing—

"I found it in his coat pocket!" said Margaret. "What could he have intended——?"

Dayton slowly went to the dressing table, picked up a .32 calibre, five-chambered revolver and broke it. It contained five shells, two of which had been discharged.

"Perhaps he bought it to defend himself against snakes," said Dayton, with a touch of bitterness. "Tell me about it. I mean, where you picked him up again."

"It's a queer story," she said. "After I got here and found he had gone and I couldn't reach you by telephone, I went after him, figuring he would probably drift back to the Tenderloin. I must have walked my shoes through."

"Sit down. I'd ask you to lie down, but you've got

to stay awake long enough to tell me about it. Then——But go ahead."

"I seemed to see everybody except the person I was looking for," she related. "Those two detectives—I kept avoiding them—and succeeded, luckily. I saw Jennie, too. That must have been after ten o'clock. She was getting out of a cab and going into a champagne place with that man who has made so much sorrow for the O'Neills. They didn't see me, and—well, it looked as if they wouldn't be able to see anybody before very long."

Her voice was charged with a resigned sadness more than bitterness.

"It must have been after eleven when I saw Mr. Grell," she went on. "I'd about given up. Felt I couldn't walk another step and was heading east, for here, through Twenty-eighth Street. I saw him—but it was very queer——" She hesitated.

"Yes. You saw Mr. Grell," Dayton encouraged. "What was queer?"

"In Twenty-eighth Street, between Fifth Avenue and Madison. He was drifting along like a man half asleep. I was going up to him when a man came around the corner from Madison Avenue and hurried up to Mr. Grell. They seemed to have an argument about something. The other man appeared very drunk, too, when he was speaking to Mr. Grell, but he hadn't seemed drunk when he came toward him. It was all very queer."

"He may have been humouring Grell."

"Maybe. But that isn't what I mean. The way they behaved. The argument seemed to be about

changing hats. They finally agreed to change hats after—I could hear everything they said. They were talking—the way drunks talk. Mr. Grell told the other man that—that the other man didn't love him. I know it sounds silly."

"It is—and it isn't," put in Dayton grimly. "Changing hats—clothes, even—is an old fool game, a mark of mutual esteem in moments of extreme bibulous affection.

"Oh! I didn't know. Well, Mr. Grell said the other did not love him if he wanted his hat back."

"Wanted it *back*! Are you sure he said *back*?"

"Yes. It was all so queer that I can't help being sure. Mr. Grell said the other set the mercenary value of a hat above the love of David and Jonathan. I'm repeating what I heard Mr. Grell say."

"What then?"

A slightly hysterical laugh burst from Margaret's lips.

"Don't!" snapped Richard.

"But—it's—it was so absurd."

"It isn't—if you only knew what it means. What happened then?"

"The other man said Mr. Grell's hat didn't fit him, was miles too big. But to show he didn't put the value of the hat above his affection for Mr. Grell he offered to stamp on it with his feet, jump on it on the pavement."

Again she laughed hysterically—gulped in a queer way. Dayton reached forward and gripped her two hands tightly in his.

"Hold fast, Margaret, and tell me the rest."

"Mr. Grell agreed," she went on, but with some difficulty in her utterance. "He took off the hat he was wearing—it must have been the other man's hat, though how or when he came by it I don't understand—and laid it on the pavement. 'Jump on it!' said Grell to this other man. Then—'But wait! Gimme back mine. I'll jump on that, too!—so it's mutual—undying.'

"Oh—I can't help it, Mr.—Richard!" the girl sobbed. "I'm tired—and it was ridiculous. They jumped up and down on the hats—and kept on jumping—and Mr. Grell was sobbing and saying, 'That's how much we love each other!' And then they put the hats on—their own hats, I suppose—and embraced—and——"

"And that's where a gun got slipped into Grell's pocket!" said Dayton, as the girl suddenly went into a convulsion of laughter and tears. She quieted down presently when she discovered her face buried on Dayton's shoulder and a strong arm about her.

"Then the other man went away?"

"Yes, and he didn't walk as if he was drunk at all. He hurried!"

"He wasn't drunk. You're right. But—did Grell call him by name at any time?"

"No. At least, I didn't catch the name."

"Doesn't matter. Then you took Grell in tow?"

"Yes, but I had difficulty persuading him at first. Said he had an engagement to—to kill somebody. Until I found the revolver I attached no meaning to his talk. But he had no chance to shoot anybody after I got him back. He kept on talking about it, and

walking. Didn't seem to know where he was walking. I just drifted with him, back across Fifth, then Broadway. I had him by the arm, so he would not reel too much. In Sixth Avenue I got a cab. By that time he was too far gone to protest."

"I know all the rest," said Dayton. "Also a lot that happened before you found him. You've provided the link I needed. Now, then——"

For a moment he was of a mind to tell her of the charge that stood against Oren Grell and about the billet of the two shots fired from that weapon on the dressing table. But the girl was at the end of her endurance.

"You get right into—or on—that bed and close your tired eyes, girl o' mine," said he, with a thickening in his throat. "It's now four o'clock in the morning. I'll be back by seven—or eight at the latest. Not sooner. What I've got in mind might be noticed if I pulled it off at an ungodly hour like this."

"What do you plan?"

"Never mind. Get on that bed!" he commanded.

She obeyed, regardless of the unconventional aspects of the situation. Her head rolled limply off the pillows. He arranged the latter—and her head—to greater comfort.

"Now, sleep, Margaret!" he whispered. "Unload everything on me. I'm running the ship."

He turned to look Grell over. That young man was deep in the lethargic slumber of a narcotic. He would be a good young man for quite some hours to come. As Dayton started to leave he glanced back at Margaret. The girl on the bed was already asleep—from

exhaustion. He went to her bedside; bent over her face; then abruptly straightened up and went out, locking the hall door after him and putting the key in his pocket.

But before leaving he had rolled up and stuffed the battered collegiate hat in one pocket and stowed the damning revolver in another.

Chapter XXIX

SPARRING FOR TIME

IN the subway basement of the Sentinel Building a great drug store company had an elaborate night-and-day branch which included in its up-to-date features a resident physician, a miniature emergency hospital, and even a laboratory. At various times the chemist in charge of the last mentioned had been helpful in technical ways to the writing staff of the very thorough newspaper upstairs. Dayton knew this chemist personally; also his chief assistant. The latter was on duty when the reporter turned up that morning about four-thirty and produced the cigarette end he had picked up in the areaway.

"Do me a favour, Mr. Curtiss," said he to the chemist in charge. "There are two ends like this one. Both were presumably smoked and discarded by the same person. Analyze this one and let me know if you find anything unusual about it."

"Glad to," said the chemist. "These little jobs are always interesting—break the monotony. I can give you a report in an hour, say, or any time before nine o'clock. I go off then."

"Make it seven o'clock. Suit you? Thanks."

Dayton presently turned to the elevator cages as a yellow light flashed up. He ascended to the city edi-

torial room on the seventeenth floor. There, the only inhabitant of the usual human beehive was a man in overalls. He was sweeping the floor (which only newspaper men know how to litter ankle deep) and emptying baskets of waste paper into a small truck. Dayton placed Grell's hat and the revolver in his coat locker, afterward carefully snapping the door lock of the steel cubicle. Then he went to his cleared desk, stretched himself at full length on its hard, smooth surface, and went to sleep a few seconds after saying to the man in overalls:

"When the night watchman comes to punch his time clock, tell him to punch me, too, exactly at seven o'clock."

As soon as the metropolitan newspapers had put their last editions to bed—which meant that Mr. Bancroft would be undisturbed by press representatives until the next day's "afternoons" became active—Stealthy Hooker appeared in the lawyer's listed residence in West Fifty-sixth Street. As the Rounder's eyes roved about the comfortable library the man who had never known home save as a thing he called the hay remarked:

"Pretty soft, Bancroft, pretty soft!"

The lawyer said nothing to this. He waved his caller to a chair. Bancroft's face was neither stern nor genial; merely set, unmoving. Then—abruptly:

"Well, Henry Villiers, who shot your brother?"

"You not heard?" asked Stealthy, groping for a packet of cigarettes.

"Oh, yes—I've heard. But—don't hedge with me. Come clean!"

The hand that Stealthy raised with a lighted match to ignite his cigarette trembled slightly. He himself saw the little light waver.

"Don't think," said he, aware also of the lawyer's perceiving eye, "that because my hand shakes I got anythin' on my conscience. I'm excited; been on the jump all night. After all, he was my brother."

Bancroft uttered a scoffing laugh. Stealthy recovered his nerve after smoking a few moments in silence, deeply inhaling and slowly expelling the smoke through his nostrils. He returned Bancroft's stare, his own eyes not hardening like the other's, but presently brightening with a kind of satisfaction, or secret amusement.

"I get you," said the Rounder easily. "But you don't get *me* right. Sure. I maybe had some reason for wishin' him outa the way. But bein' the person as would benefit, excep' for his leavin' a widow, or maybe bein' miffed that he got married, or sore like illegitimate brothers always seem to be, I still wouldn't be such a dam' fool as to let myself be even distantly connected with the killin' of H. Augustus."

Bancroft was a little taken aback by this frankness. He pondered the other's speech. Then—

"The voice is the voice of Hooker, but the hand is the hand of—Japhet? No use sparring, however. What do you know? What, at least, is the story you've made up your mind to tell me?"

"The only story I know—the exact truth," said Stealthy, smoking steadily. "A fella named Grell

plugged Smythe in a fit of jealousy aggravated by an oncomin' attack of jim-jams. I'm makin' a good guess when I say that this Kimball dame, Mrs. Smythe, had an affair with Grell one time an' maybe they had a little unofficial honeymoon in Europe. They had a break before or after they got back to the U. S. A. Then she took up an' married Smythe—for a meal ticket. When she an' Smythe broke up, too, she switched back to the old flame for a while. Then Grell went blooey when he found she was leadin' a double—triple—life. Husband to one man, lady love to another; an' visitin' a third in his apartments in—a 'Mr. Prestcott's' apartments, where she was known as 'Miss Forrest.' "

Bancroft, who had not been aware until this moment that Hooker knew, deduced, or guessed so much, was momentarily afraid. But he covered his fear with an assumption of high indignation.

"I had known Miss Kimball for years——" he began.

"Yet I had to introduce you at Jefferson Market Court six months ago!" Stealthy interrupted with a chuckle. "As you say, what's the use sparrin'? I'm on, Bancroft. But it's all right with me."

"Nevertheless, my friend, you will be so good as to accept my statement that the relations of Frances and myself—were—are—have always been—of the best and noblest nature."

"'S all right with me," repeated Stealthy indifferently, "so long as you accept my statement that I didn't have a thing to do with pluggin' Brother Smythe, while this Grell *had* reasons for doin' it."

"Of course, I see that now," said Bancroft quickly. "His action was that of a criminally insane idiot. Only—I'm not hiding from you, my friend, that this thing will make an ugly noise. Nothing more unfortunate could have happened for all concerned. First, the rich mother's murder—still unsolved. An heir turns up. Then old Louis Villiers stirs public curiosity and speculation as to whether young Smythe was, or was not, a legitimate heir. Then that heir is murdered. It looks queer. Even to me it looks queer. How will it look to the public? I mean, how *would* it look if, say, it became known that there is a Japhet with a grievance in the background?"

"Nobody's gonna know a thing about Japhet—as things are," said Stealthy coolly. "Not from me—no, sir! An' not from you, Bancroft, either. This thing maybe helps your little plans along while seeming to spoil them."

"Eh? What plans? Helps—while seeming to spoil?"

"I sorta had a notion," said the Rounder, gazing blandly at the tip of his cigarette, "that you were thinking of buying a yacht an' goin' cruisin' with a string quartette one of them days."

"Ah!" snapped Bancroft. "I see what's in the sewer that some might call your mental processes! I shall not lower myself to answer that. Only—one thing is certain, my perceptive friend. This killing absolutely precludes your coming out publicly with any of this Japhet stuff. You may have been too near the scene of that shooting and too ready with that Grell story.

Something tells me that you had a hand in first bringing it to the attention of the police."

Hooker's face turned the colour of stale dough. Bancroft saw that mildew grayness and laughed.

"Just so! You're safe, of course. Only—you've inadvertently locked *yourself* in the safe. I think that I, on the outside, hold the combination."

The Rounder looked like some cowardly predatory animal cornered by another of greater bulk, if not courage. On the desperate defensive Stealthy licked his lips and said:

"I didn't have nothin' to gain. She gets everything. Why should I 'a' done it? An' don't you try to unload on me, Bancroft! Supposin' I was to yell that you put me up to it? There's lots would believe it!"

"I?—put you up to it?" cried the lawyer, his voice quivering with rage—or something else.

"That day you slipped me a thousand bucks, before ever Smythe married himself an heir, you didn't mind admittin' that I'd be next-of-kin under common-law or somethin' if anythin' happened to Smythe—an' even offered to take up my claim—when—and if——"

There was silence in that comfortably appointed library for a few minutes. Stealthy recovered himself somewhat and lighted another cigarette. Bancroft, after a snarl followed by much heavy breathing, controlled his rage, but not his agitation. He was walking up and down, his fingers laced and twiddling behind his back in a characteristic way. These two were momentarily at a deadlock.

"Very well," said the lawyer after a while, and speaking as if there had been no unpleasant side issues

raised in the discussion. "It seems clear, then, that this man, Grell, insane from fancied jealousy and actual drink, wilfully and without real justification shot and killed my client—your brother—H. Augustus Villiers Smythe."

"That seems to be what it comes down to," said Stealthy.

"Very well. The law doubtless will deal with him."

"It's a cinch."

"I only hope that Frances, the poor widow, will not be dragged into the matter by a defense that would seek to show this Grell had been driven to his rash act by a woman's alleged double-dealing."

"She should worry. She inherits a million."

"Let me assure you that the lady is not so utterly soulless as that—or you!" cried Bancroft severely. "It may surprise you, my cynical friend, to learn that she loved him, deeply, devotedly."

"Oh, can it, Bancroft, can it!" jeered the Rounder.

"Have it your own way, then!" said the other with a savage shrug.

"Sure. An' I'll have a drink, if you're not runnin' a temperance joint, too."

"Certainly," Bancroft muttered in a momentarily absent way. "I was about to suggest moistening the discussion."

"And I wonder," added Stealthy, as the lawyer produced a decanter and glasses; "I wonder if you could arrange for, say, five hundred bucks, so it would be ready an' negotiable in a hurry if I should take it into my head to beat it."

"Ah?" Bancroft breathed, pausing in the act of

pouring from the decanter. "You mean—if things took an unpleasant turn—discretion might prevail over valour."

"Have it your own way," came a mocking echo.

Nothing was said while they drank. Bancroft, refilling the glasses, seemed preoccupied. He was weighing the possible advantages to himself should this Japhet—this perennial stumbling block—decide to extricate his physical presence from some unpleasant turn of events.

"Yes," said he at last. "That might be arranged—in cash, too. I think I can answer for Mrs. Villiers Smythe—that she would wish the—er—allowance to be continued."

The winter dawn, breaking late over the city, was graying when Melville Hooker sought that Tenderloin lair which he called the hay. He was satisfied that he was at least breaking even with the game.

At precisely seven o'clock that same morning the night watchman of the Sentinel Building awoke a reporter who had been asleep on a desk in the city room. Dayton shook off his drowsiness and became alert.

"Thanks, Bill," said he. "Got an early morning assignment. Wasn't worth while going home to bed."

He got his hat and coat from the locker. In that steel cubicle there was quite an assorted wardrobe. Sometimes there was a hurry call for a tuxedo or a mackintosh. Assignments came suddenly and had a way of being various. He put on the hat and coat he had taken off when he came in, saw that Grell's battered hat and the significant revolver were well con-

cealed, and then stuffed into his coat pocket a golf cap which he found in the wardrobe assortment.

Carefully snapping the catch of the locker (and testing its locked condition) he descended in the elevator to the subway basement. There the obliging chemist handed him a slip of paper with a queer smile.

"Interesting," said Mr. Curtiss.

"Quite!" said Dayton, after a glance at what was written on the paper. "Would you mind sticking your John Hancock under that—and the date? And what opera appeals most to Mrs. Curtiss? I might have a couple of press seats."

Thirty minutes later he was back in Margaret's room-and-kitchen apartment. Since the coast was quite clear he had admitted himself with the key he had taken away with him. The place was as he had left it, except that winter morn was now brightening the interior. Margaret, still fully dressed, was sound asleep on the single bed; Grell, too, on the sofa. Richard roused her gently.

"Sorry, girl o' mine. We've got to get busy now. It's getting on for eight o'clock."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'll show you," said he. "But, first, is anyone likely to recognize you in the general receiving room for outdoor patients at Bellevue Hospital?"

"No. It's hardly likely. I never have business there. I go direct to my ward. Why?"

"But not before noon. Good! Now, look the other way a moment, please," he said, deliberately turning her head with his hands so that she faced away from the man on the sofa.

She was mystified but obedient. It was a relief to have a man running the ship, giving her orders—this man, at least. But she involuntarily turned with alarm when she heard a sound like a dull slap, or blow, on human flesh. Grell was sitting bolt upright on the sofa with one hand clapped over one eye. Dayton had adopted a brutal means of awakening his man.

"Why—*why* did you do that?" cried a distressed Margaret.

"So he'll have a black eye," said Dayton cheerily. "Every little bit helps."

Grell was awake—very much awake—but shaking weakly. He tried to muster energy to fight. He had been struck! But the moment he struggled to his feet the reaction of the narcotic affected his stomach. He was overcome with nausea.

"Fine!" said Dayton, steering his victim to the kitchen. "He'll look even worse—after this."

Five minutes later he brought back a sad-looking spectacle. Before that he had offered a glass of whisky to a man who again became nauseated at the mere sight and smell of the stuff. When the ingenious *Sentinel* man saw that Grell could never swallow the drink, he compromised by spilling the liquor over the other's stained and rumpled shirt.

"That'll serve as well," said he.

Then he brought the whisky-reeking, puffy-faced spectacle out to the waiting and astounded Margaret. Without explaining further just then, he helped Grell into his coat and supplied him with a golf cap which, ill-fitting, added nothing to the young man's charms,

which a rapidly discolouring eye was not aiding in the least.

"Get your things on, Margaret," ordered Dayton with a grin. He seemed to be enjoying this brutal business. "No, not your nurse's uniform—anything but that! We're taking Mr. Johnson for a walk."

"Mister—who?" stammèred the girl.

"For God's sake, Dayton!" muttered the almost helpless Grell. "What——?"

"Shut up!" said Richard. "It's only a couple of minutes' walk, Margaret. Nobody's around much at this time o' day in this section. We'll have him in the alcoholic ward before you can say 'Jimmy!'"

"The alco—*my* ward?—32?"

"Just so, Margaret, unless you know of a better place to hide a man. A jail might be safer, but the formalities of breaking in are a bit stiff, except when you are anxious to keep out."

"I don't understand," said the nurse in training. "Of course, he needs treatment, but—it's a dreadful place."

"That's just why nobody's likely to look for him there," grinned the *Sentinel* man. "You see, there are some people out to find Brother Grell. There was a little shooting affair last night, Margaret. I don't mind telling you that much. There isn't a jury on earth would agree that Grell didn't have a hand in it. I want to stow him away until I can see the wind blow in another direction. Do you begin to see?"

Margaret stared wide-eyed. "Yes, I think I begin to see."

"All right. Let's go. Come on, Grell! For your

own sake, for your father's sake, for the sake of this girl and a friend that's giving you a better break than maybe you deserve—pull yourself together to walk just two blocks. And get this sunk into your otherwise paralyzed brain: *Your name's Jack Johnson.* This"—pointing to Margaret—"is your long-suffering wife, Mrs. Johnson. You've agreed to let her put you in the alcoholic ward to straighten out, and you've promised to be a good, sober husband forever after!"

"Are you—are you crazy?" Grell managed to say. "What—what for?"

"Well—you see—last night you shot and killed Villiers Smythe, and the police are combing the whole city for you!"

"Oh!" screamed Margaret. "Is *that* it?"

"Yes," said Dayton. "Smythe's been shot." But he put his lips close to the girl's ear and added in a whisper: "He didn't do it, but all the evidence indicates that he did. I need twenty-four hours to clear him. In the meantime, they mustn't find Grell. . . . Come on, now! Let's go, you old souse!"

"Oh!" breathed Margaret, her eyes resting with hero admiration upon Dayton's face. "You're—you're clever!"

"Positively brilliant at times!" laughed Richard, as Margaret suddenly decided to throw off an ulster that was a bit familiar around Bellevue and substitute a modest cloth coat. She also put on a hat that somehow altered as much of her face as it did not hide.

Ten minutes later the trio came to the wide gateway giving entrance to the little streets and avenues within the walled area of one of the world's largest hospital

institutions. Dayton did not enter. He feared recognition and questioning by the newspaper reporters ever on duty at Bellevue. Grell had walked the two blocks with just a little steadying assistance. Now, Margaret—"Mrs. Johnson"—ought to be able to carry through the rest.

The girl and the whisky-reeking man with the discolouring eye presently found seating space on one of the wooden benches in the general outdoor patients' receiving room. One of the several internes passing along the lines of ailing applicants paused before Grell, sniffed, gave but one glance at the patient, then looked with a certain amount of sympathy at the young woman who sat with downcast eyes.

"Been drinking, hey?"

"Yes."

"Hold out your hand," the interne commanded Grell.

The nerveless hand that was presented had to be raised and held up by "Mrs. Johnson."

"Want to have him put in the ward?" asked the interne with business-like brevity.

"Oh, thank you," said the supposed wife. "He's sick—and sorry—and he really wants to get straightened out."

"We'll fix him up for you," was the kindly comment, as the young doctor wrote the name "John Johnson" on a card, added "Margaret Johnson, wife," as next of kin, and an address she gave offhand—her mother's address. The interne then scribbled "32" opposite "Ward——" and signalled an attendant.

"All right," said the budding medico to Margaret,

as "Jack Johnson" was led by the attendant across the court to a gray pavilion with steel-barred windows. "We won't let him out until he's a good and sober husband, and we *can't* let him out till you come and claim him—say, in about a week from now."

Across the way a steel door attended by a giant of a man was bolted after the admission of Grell to that house of delirium sometimes referred to as the Zoo.

Chapter XXX

ROLLING HIS OWN

DAYTON reported to the *Sentinel* office shortly after noon. The city room was half deserted, the reportorial staff seldom appearing before 1:30 P. M. But the city editor was there, and his assistant. The C. E. had a stack of "Villiers Smythe Shooting" clippings that had been sheared by the assistant from the earliest afternoon papers.

"I suppose this is the Element you're after," said the C. E., passing the stack to Dayton. "Eat 'em up, boy, and get out on the job again. The *status quo* remains static. It all points to Grell. But they haven't found him. He never went back to the hotel. Probably holed up somewhere."

"Probably," said Dayton. "But I think I can find him when I want him."

"Huh?" exclaimed the C. E., eyeing the reporter keenly. "You'd hardly make a remark like that to the police."

"Hardly. You'll excuse me, boss, if I don't enlarge on it to you—just yet."

"'Nough said, Dickie," said the city editor, who had once been a brilliant reporter himself and understood occasional reticence. "It's your yarn. Bring home the bacon. That's all. Don't—and you may be

pork yourself! Only this—getting from business to personal: Grell's a friend of yours, or was. His old man, Peter Grell of Rochester, is a lifelong friend of the Manajed. It would please a lot of people if you could prove this young fellow didn't do that shooting."

"I think I'll have him clear within twenty-four hours."

"Huh? Sounds like you believe yourself. All right! Keep your little friend holed up, then. Here's hoping maybe you holed him up yourself. In the meantime, drop in again about five o'clock; at least, before I turn over the schedule to Byrd. Before the Manajed left the office about four this morning he filed a telegram to Peter Grell advising him ahead of newspaper deliveries about what's happened to his son. A haggard father is due to blow in here late this afternoon. He'll want to see you, maybe."

"I'll be here," said the reporter, retiring to study the clippings pertaining to latest developments.

Half an hour later he headed for the House of the Two Green Eyes. He wanted a little piece of information which had no direct connection with the murder case in hand.

Sergeant Houlahan was in charge and Dayton inquired for Policeman Phidias's home address.

"What you want that for?" asked Houlahan. "Poor Phiddy stands to be broke over this business. They had him out o' bed an' down to headquarters and the district attorney's this mornin'. He ain't at home. He was in here fi' minutes ago. Look in at Casey's. Maybe he's there."

Phidias was. The fact saved Dayton time and trouble and the awkwardness of running the gauntlet of a possibly suspecting and worried Mrs. Phidias. The Classic Cop, in civilian clothes, was gloomily staring at a schooner of beer when Dayton pulled up a chair in Casey's back room.

"Cheer up, old man!" said the reporter. "I'm about ready to clean up. Dimly I perceive, already, much honour, glory, and credit redounding to one Phidias, whose brilliance as a sun of penetration is merely overshadowed for the moment by a cloud."

"Quit yer kiddin'," growled the man who might have to go back to monument sculpturing.

"I will," said Dayton, all at once grave. "Tell me everything you did, saw, imagined you saw, and thought you thought about it all—last night. I haven't had a chance to get it first hand. Never mind about that valuable clue you found in the areaway. Just——"

"Clue? Me? You gone batty?" said Phidias blankly.

"I said, never mind about that. Leave it to me. I promised to see you squared. Just tell me all you saw and heard and thought about it. You can be as detailed as any gabby policeman likes to be."

Whereupon Phidias, who had much faith in the power of the press and the abilities of Richard Dayton, repeated all that he had told the chief of the detective bureau and the district attorney—with the addition of what he had not told either, which is what Policeman Phidias *thought* about it all.

When the reporter and the policeman ended a quite lengthy session, both seemed satisfied—even elated.

Dayton was quietly smiling. Phidias was grinning from ear to ear.

"But it'll be kinda raw on Burrige!" said the Classic Cop.

"To blazes with Burrige!" said Dayton. "He only stands to gain nothing. You stand to lose everything. Take your choice. I've taken mine. And," he added with mock solemnity, "don't lose that clue!"

"I can't, when I ain't seen it yet!" chuckled Mr. Phidias.

After spending a most leisurely two hours in Oscar Hammerstein's Victoria, enjoying the cleverest type of vaudeville New York knew then—or has known since—Dayton, the supposedly industrious, strolled into the *Sentinel* office about 5 P. M.

He had nothing to report to the city editor that was at all new. The day C. E., who was about to turn the schedule over to the night C. E., nodded and said:

"All right, Nick Carter. When you're ready. But for heaven's sake, make what you serve up look like a fresh dish instead of a hash from yesterday's leftovers. Go on into the Manajed's room. The haggard parent has come."

The interview between Dayton and Mr. Peter Grell was brief. The Manajed contributed mainly the introduction to the father from Rochester of the reporter who had been his son's friend in New York. Peter Grell was a fine type of the brusque, kindly, up-state banker who has risen to local high eminence and respect by virtue of his native qualities. He looked, naturally enough, a bit drawn at this moment.

"I have heard my son speak of you, Mr. Dayton, in terms of high regard and affection," said he. "Have you any news for me?—any good news at all?"

"None that I can tell you," was the reply. "But," Dayton added quickly, seeing a man's head droop, "I can offer you this assurance: Your son did not shoot Villiers Smythe."

"Thank God for that! And thank you, too, young man. Where is he?"

"I've got him. At least, I know exactly where he is and can produce Oren the minute the police are not so ready to clap on the handcuffs."

Mr. Grell looked puzzled and dubious. The Man-ajed cut in with a chuckle:

"I think we'd better leave this to Mr. Dayton, Peter. Of course, as his managing editor I could order him to be explicit on pain of discharge, but——You feel, Dayton, that you are acting wisely for all concerned?"

"I do."

"You won't even *whisper* to me where he is," said the father, "on my solemn word not to try to see him?"

"Well, for one thing," said Dayton, evading, "I'm trying to sober him up."

"Ah—I see," Peter Grell said heavily. "I suspected that, somehow." He groaned; but then braced himself with the remark: "It may be the lesson he needed."

"It is—just that," said Dayton. "But now," he added, "if you don't mind, I'd like to go about the business that may get him out of the mess before this time to-morrow."

"Yes, indeed! Don't let me delay *that!*" cried Mr.

Grell. "And—and God bless you, boy, God bless you!"

"Run along, son, run along!" said the Manajed, noting the reporter's embarrassment.

For a man who was supposed to be moving mountains to save Oren Grell from arrest on a charge of murder, Richard Dayton was behaving in a most leisurely manner. He went to his rooms about six, freshened himself with a bath and a change of clothes, bought himself quite a sumptuous dinner at Henley's, and even requested the orchestra to play for his special delectation the Faust *aria*, "Let Me Gaze on Thy Vision."

It was about eight o'clock that evening when he entered the House of the Two Green Eyes. Barrie, his substitute, was surprised to see him—and disappointed.

"You taking over from me, Dayton?"

"No. I'm supposed to be on the Smythe case. Nothing doing on it, though. Taking it easy myself. May drop into a show later."

He presently strolled out, leaving Barrie to the job that graduates from cubdom coveted. From a Sixth Avenue drug store Dayton telephoned the nurses' rooming house about eight-fifteen. Margaret had not returned. Again he tried at eight-thirty, and once more at nine o'clock from the shack of the Combine, to which he had finally repaired. Margaret, for some reason, had not come off duty from Bellevue at seven-thirty. At least, she had not returned to her room for

that sleep which, Dayton knew, she urgently needed. It was queer.

He had merely wished to know how she had left things in Ward 32. He would not risk calling the hospital. He was of a mind to make a hurried trip over to the rooming house in person. He could do it. The night was still young. The man he was waiting to see might not turn up before midnight. Melville Hooker's comings and goings were as mysterious as his doings. He might not come at all. That would be unfortunate. But he could not afford to *miss* him—that night.

The question of remaining or going to inquire in person was settled by Fate. Stealthy was even then coming down the street from Sixth Avenue. Dayton knew that loose, slouchy gait. His heart began to beat as with venture's anticipation. But he must keep cool if he was to win on a bluff. Everything depended on that bluff.

He saw Hooker enter the House. Dayton waited a few minutes, then crossed the street from the shack and himself passed in between the green lamps. There were present in the dingy room four persons and the station-house cat. The cat was asleep by the stove. Sergeant M'Gonigle was on the desk. The Sphinx was wiping his glasses with a soiled handkerchief. Beside him, in the alcove corner, Barrie was reading a book. Hooker was in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"Gi' me a fag," said Dayton to the Rounder, "I know they're rotten, but maybe I can stand it."

"Roll your own, then," said Stealthy, producing and offering the makings.

"Don't know how," Dayton confessed, at the same time making a mental note that Stealthy was wearing a new hat. "That's a ready-made you're smoking. Gi' me one of those."

Stealthy, with a queer look on his face, produced a package of cigarettes of a well-advertised brand. "What's the use wastin' 'em on you!" he protested. "You tried one an' chucked it away after two puffs."

"Aw, don't be so dam' stingy!" cried Dayton, rather hilariously, as if he had had a drink too many. In fact, he was clearly in a somewhat boisterous humour. He snatched the opened package from Stealthy's hand with the word "*stingy*" and backed off, laughing, as Hooker jumped up with a cry of—"Here! Gimme them back!" At the same time Dayton stuck one of Hooker's cigarettes in his mouth and, with a grin of devilry, put the package in his own pocket.

"Not till you're nice about it, Stealthy," said he.

Hooker's face was a little pale, but he forced a smile. It came to him, as it appeared to the Sphinx and Barrie (the sergeant was busy writing up his blotter) that this was just a bit of quizzing, for Stealthy was notoriously thrifty in the matter of offering cigarettes or drinks.

"Gimme the cigs, Dayton," he said, advancing on the other.

"Let's see if you can take 'em away from me!" was the challenge.

"I'll show you, all right!"

They closed in a friendly wrestling match, fraught with much laughter and comment.

"Watch he don't bust your new hat, Stealthy!" the Sphinx cried.

"Look out! You're stepping on the cat!" This from Barrie.

Laughing and wrestling, Stealthy and Dayton stumbled about the room, the Rounder trying to get at the pocket into which Dayton had slipped the cigarettes.

"Where'd you buy the new hat, Stealthy? *When'd* you buy it?" the *Sentinel* man whispered in his adversary's ear.

"Gimme the cig'rettes!" gasped the Rounder, who was short-winded from overindulgence in what he sought to recover.

Dayton was looking into the other's face as they struggled. Stealthy's eyes, close to his adversary's, were filled with a fear quite out of keeping with the grin which seemed fixed on that countenance so pallid and damp.

"Take 'em then!" cried Dayton, wrestling more furiously. But again he added a whisper in his opponent's ear: "You shouldn't leave butts lying around areaways, Stealthy. It's old stuff!"

As he whispered this he pinned Hooker against the wall, holding him momentarily at a disadvantage.

"Leave go! Lemme loose!" the Rounder pleaded. "You got me foul!"

"I have—and I haven't!" laughed Dayton. "Come on outside," he added in that whisper.

"All right. Gimme the cig'rettes, though."

"Maybe I will," said Dayton, aloud, adding softly, "—outside. We'll talk."

He released his hold. At once Stealthy resumed

the wrestling game; whether to cover his awareness of those whisperings or in a last desperate effort to recover the cigarettes was not clear to Dayton himself. But the sergeant took a hand, looking up from his blotter with a frown.

"Come, now, boys!" said M'Gonigle. "That'll do! Captain might walk in any minnit. After all, this is a police station."

"All right, Sarge," said Dayton, breaking away from Stealthy and escaping by the street door, still pursued, however, by Hooker.

They came face to face on the sidewalk. Dayton had turned and was waiting for the other. Stealthy, his face ghastly in the light of the green lamps, still tried to keep that grin fixed as he said:

"Gimme back the cigs, Dickie. Aw, come on!"

"Sure," said Dayton coolly. "It was just a bluff to get you outside. I've got something to hand you."

"Oh, you have? Fine!" said the *Lark* man, visibly brightening.

"Just a second while I tip off Barrie to watch Hotchkiss doesn't slip something over while I'm out."

"Thought you were off the House to-night," Hooker was saying as the other ran back up the steps between the lamps. Dayton did not answer and was absent within for about fifteen seconds.

In that brief interim, regardless of the suspicious alertness of the Sphinx and the blank puzzlement of Sergeant M'Gonigle, Dayton swiftly handed the opened package of cigarettes to his astonished substitute.

"Here, Barrie!" said he snappily. "Take these!

Hold on to them for me! Count how many in the package. Show 'em to the Sarge and Hotchkiss, but let nobody monkey with them. And all of you three remember how, when, and from whom I grabbed them!"

In the next second he was gone out to join a relieved and totally unsuspecting Rounder.

"What—in—hell!" said the surprised Sphinx to the flabbergasted graduate from cubdom, while the Sergeant thoughtfully glanced at the clock and dipped his pen in the inkwell.

Outside, face to face with Melville Hooker under the jaundiced light of the green lamps, Dayton said sharply.

"Now, then, let's find a place where you and I can talk—about hats, cigarettes, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses!"

Chapter XXXI

EYES OF THE NIGHT

HE led Hooker to the stoop of an old residence house diagonally across the street and a little west of the station house. The stoop was dark in its own shadows, being situated exactly between one street lamp and another.

"Gee! I got to smoke!" hinted Stealthy, as he sat down on a sandstone step, following Dayton's example.

"Nervous—eh?" said the latter. He produced a slightly bent but unbroken cigarette. "Here! I slipped that one from my mouth to my pocket when we started to scrap. Thought you might need it presently."

Melville Hooker stared uneasily at the other's face. It was too dark to read Dayton's expression. The Rounder's hand trembled as he lighted the cigarette. He puffed in silence for a few moments, then glanced with even greater uneasiness at the silent man sitting beside him. All he could distinguish was Dayton's profile against the green lamps diagonally across to the right. The *Sentinel* man appeared to be staring at the station lights.

"Well? Come across with the hand-out," said Stealthy.

"Eh?" said Dayton in a startled way. "Oh! I was just thinking about those green lamps over there. You know——" He took from his pocket a package of cigarettes. Stealthy was about to reach and grab when he saw that they did not bear the familiar covering of the package taken from him. The fact that the other had had cigarettes of his own all the time . . . Hooker's presentiment increased. "You know," Dayton repeated, after lighting up one of his own, "they always make me think—the lights—the green lights—of a pair of eyes that have taken their jaundiced hue from what they have seen of life from their only viewpoint of life. Just two green eyes full of evil, malice, cynicism, ferocity, albeit sorrow, pathos, a deep and abiding misery—as if habit of seeing nothing else had made for a gleam embodying all these things."

"Why don't you put it in a book?" Stealthy said with a laugh that failed to cover nerves in his articulation.

"Some day I may. It's an idea—symbolic. Just look at them yourself for a minute, Hooker, without speaking. You get the illusion I do? They seem to turn and look directly at you, like the very spirit of that power of crime detection of which they are the outpost markers. They seem to look *through* you, perceiving all that's rotten in you more than what's decent. They turn and look, and in that basilisk stare they read every secret you would like to hide. Nothing is too fantastically impossible or incomprehensible in human waywardness to them. They have seen, heard, or read it all before, over and over."

"What's all this got to do with the hand-out you get for me?"

"Just this: The two green eyes seem brighter to-night—more unblinking. So it seems to me. Staring this way, too, because maybe a new twist has been given to an old story. They're interested. They don't want to miss any of it."

"What's the idea?" The voice of the man sitting on the step of the old brownstone residence had a dry catch in it.

"The idea is the story of a man who maybe had reason for, or thought he might profit by, getting rid of another man. But the first man, Number One, was too great a coward to do it himself. He was afraid of the big chair that hisses and smokes and creaks and whines and groans when the juice is turned on."

"Sounds like *Quirinal* stuff!" said the Rounder in a voice that curiously failed him.

"But one night," Dayton went on, unheeding, "Number One met a third man who maybe had a little grudge of his own against this same fellow, Number Two. This third man—Number Three—that Number One met was very drunk; almost alcoholically insane. Number Three had bought a revolver—a five-chambered revolver, by the way—from a pawnbroker named Davinski. And he had announced openly in a public bar that he was going to lay for this Number Two and bump him off with a shot.

"He went, Number Three did. Number one, getting word of it in that same bar, went after him presently—maybe to see that Number Three didn't do anything so criminally foolish. This, too, in spite of

the fact that Number One had—still has—the lingering remains of a black eye Number Three had given him in a little altercation.”

Dayton paused, but he did not look around at Hooker. The latter was still there, he knew. He might not have been, he was so silent. But there was a sound of heavy breathing.

“Anyway, Number One overtook Number Three a block away and led him off across town. A policeman who saw them go off together thought maybe Number One was taking care of Number Three. The policeman knew them both. But it wasn’t a policeman—maybe nobody but a fellow by the name of D. Duction—who saw what happened five or ten minutes later, when Number One and Number Three got to discussing the circumstances of that black eye. Number One was ready to forgive it. Number Three, being very drunk, wept and said he was sorry about it. He said he loved Number One like a brother, and wept the more to think that Number One didn’t love *him*. Number Three declared that love and forgiveness could only be proved satisfactorily by the exchange of hats—an old drunken ceremony which is maybe a survival of the days when solemnly sober knights exchange tokens of brotherhood.

“Be that as it may, Number One and Number Three exchanged hats. And in some way—easy enough, considering how drunk Number Three was—Number One stole that revolver out of the other’s pocket; no doubt with the commendable idea of preventing Number Three from committing murder. Maybe, then, unable to get Number Three to go home, or anywhere

else, Number One just left him hanging on to a railing—say, in Twenty-eighth Street.”

Dayton paused again and drew on his cigarette. He glanced sidewise at Hooker. The Rounder was sitting all hunched up, motionless and silent. He had forgotten to smoke. There was no spark in his evil-smelling cigarette.

“After that,” the story builder continued, “the green eyes over there can quite see, as I do, what Number One did next, although not clearly *why* he did it. Maybe he had not quite forgiven Number Three for that black eye. Maybe Number One saw his chance to get square for that blow and at the same time work off his secret grudge against this Number Two that Number Three had publicly announced he was going to kill with the revolver he’d bought from Davinski for that purpose. Or maybe Number One had just been smoking too many cigarettes tinctured with a form of hashish called *cannabis indica*.

“Keep still, Hooker! Don’t interrupt the Muse!” Dayton interlarded softly as the Rounder started and was getting to his feet. A strong hand drew him down. In that moment he was too limp to resist.

“Yes, it was easy,” Dayton resumed. “Number Three was too drunk to know or remember what he did that night. The evidence—and there would be loads of it—would lean heavily against poor old Number Three. And this seeming evidence, together with Number One’s grudges, and some impulse maybe growing out of an excess of hashish, made it seem like a very clever coup to Number One, who slipped around

the block to the entrance of an apartment house where Number Two was about due to arrive.

"Number One hadn't meant to rejoin Number Three after he finished his little job. But it occurred to him that it might be awkward for himself if Number Three, who was supposed to be the gunman, was found to be wearing Number One's hat. So Number One hurried back—after the little job—and was lucky enough to find Number Three still hanging on to the railing in Twenty-eighth Street. Putting the revolver from which two of the five shots had been fired—putting it back into Number Three's pocket was as easy as taking it had been.

"Not so easy to get the hat, though. Number One, who had just killed a man and was in quite a hurry, had to be patient and do a lunatic act to humour Number Three into reëxchanging. He had to jump on his own hat and tell the inebriate he loved him, while Number Three performed similarly with *his* hat—just to show it wasn't the mercenary value of the hats that stood in the way of reëxchange. And, as Number One pointed out clearly—so clearly that somebody overheard—Number Three's hat didn't fit him at all!

"By the way, Stealthy," Dayton shot at Hooker in a quick, sharp way. "I see you've bought a new hat! What did you do with the old, battered felt? *Burn it?*"

"Lis'n!" came in a dry, choky whisper from the Rounder. "I—I—maybe you think you got—this fella, Number One. But—lis'n!"

"Presently! I'm not done yet, Hooker. You see, I'm not as sure as you are that I've got this fellow—

Number One. A lot of it's guesswork, to be perfectly fair and frank with you. Only—Number One convicted himself while he was in that areaway waiting for Number Two, and did it like the original bonehead in the first unoriginal crime story. He smoked a couple of cigarettes of his own peculiar brand—and left the butts! But a chemical analysis, showing plain, ordinary cigarettes just doctored with tincture of *cannabis indica*, taken in conjunction with what D. Duction, backed by two more material witnesses, can tell, rather tend to make Number One's guilt appear conclusive. That's why I grabbed your private package of cigarettes, Stealthy, and went back into the station house to turn them over to Barrie, with Hotchkiss and the sergeant as witnesses of *how, when, where, and from whom* I acquired them."

A faint muttering, a whispering moan came from the man sitting hunched up at Dayton's shoulder. The Rounder's head and shoulders were drooping forward over his knees.

"I've got you, Stealthy," said the *Sentinel* man quietly, with almost a note of compassion. "I'm not asking you to admit it——"

"I—admit it!" gasped the other. "I'm admitting it—to you, Dickie, because you're a friend—an' you got the goods on me. But I'm not admitting it—to anybody else! Get that!" The last was a flare-up of defiance; but it died out. The rest came in a miserable note of utter surrender. "It was just them dam' cigarettes, an' I was sore on Grell—that crack in the eye—an' I was crazy enough to think it was maybe my chance to——"

"To bump off Villiers Smythe," Dayton supplied. "Only this, Stealthy. Why did you do it? Why Smythe? What had you against *him*?"

There was silence. Slowly the Rounder raised and turned a gray face toward Dayton. In the darkness the *Sentinel* man could not read what was on that pallid countenance. But presently he heard a snarling voice:

"So you *don't* know everything! You bluffed me, you ———!"

"E-e-asy, Hooker, e-e-easy! Yes. I bluffed you to a standstill. But not such a bluff, at that. I *do* know everything, except just *why* you killed Smythe. However, the law won't worry about that so long as it can prove that you did commit a murder with premeditation. I won't hide from you, as I'm being frank, that the old chair that smokes and whines is looming right ahead of you, just back of those two green eyes that are staring at you from over the way."

"Christ!" moaned the other. It was like an instinctive appeal for that Mercy not to be expected from mere man.

"But get this straight, Hooker," said Dayton. "While as a good citizen I have to do my duty, maybe there's an angle to this I don't know about which might induce me to give you at least an even break. After all, I'm a newspaper man—not a policeman."

"I get you," said Stealthy—after a silence, during which he pondered this last utterance of Dayton's. "You mean—if I give you the whole dope on the story——"

"Being a newspaper man doesn't make me a poor

citizen," interrupted the other. "I only said that there *might* be some angle to justify me in giving you—say, a running start—so the police might earn at least the credit of catching up with you. I'm not promising, of course. It depends on the angle."

Once more a silence. When Hooker spoke again it was as a man cornered, desperate, seeing only one way of possible escape.

"You got the goods on me, Dickie. How you done it I don't figger. I'd tell you to go to hell—except—them cig'rettes, an' the package you grabbed. But if you gimme a break, I'll—I'll give you the rest of the yarn, an' a release on it for, say, a coupla days from now."

"The release will be binding when, and as, I dictate it," said Dayton. "It depends. Why did you do it?"

"Why? I dunno—damned if I do—*now*! Only—it was the hashish—an' Grell with that gun—an' what he'd said to Tim O'Brien—an' that crack in the eye. Then—there was some crazy notion got in my head—if Smythe was outa the way—I might get that money—after the widow—or share up with her——"

"Hold on! What are you trying to tell me?"

"The story—the story you'll clean up on—to give me the break. You see, Smythe was my brother. Louis Villiers was my old man."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Dayton, utterly taken aback for the moment. Then swiftly he recalled the likeness Bancroft had playfully remarked—old Louis Villiers's curious affection for the *Lark's* night-hawk.

"Does Bancroft—*has* Bancroft—known this?" he asked in a startled way.

"Maybe, I dunno," mumbled Stealthy.

"He does. You know he does!" asserted Dayton. "Did *he* put you up to this?—suggest it? Think carefully, now!"

There was a distinct pause before Stealthy answered, "No."

"All right," said the *Sentinel* man grimly. "We'll let that go, for the moment. I've got my own idea about it, though, and I'll get Mr. Bancroft sooner or later. In the meantime—how do you know Smythe was your brother? How long have you known it? Was it because you discovered you were the legitimate heir to money he was spending like water that you plugged him? Or were you just sore because you found yourself illegitimate through no fault of your own, and Villiers Smythe legitimate through no merit of his? Tell me the whole yarn."

Which Stealthy presently did, less willingly than with a desperate hope—and reservations. He left Bancroft severely out of it, except to say that it was the lawyer's remark about the likeness which had suggested something to begin with, and suggested something more after the Louis Villiers story was printed in the *Sentinel*. But Stealthy added something to offset possible reservations when he told Dayton what no other human being knew—that at a certain private sanitarium in Rockland County, some months before, Louis Villiers, who had recently passed away, had wept senile tears and called Melville Hooker "my son"—

admitting himself the father, though through no legal union, and vainly wishing that before he went to his account he might have been able to do something for the only child he ever had. But all the remorseful old hotel man could do—because of Mary Villiers, née Corbin, and other circumstances—was to sob on his son's shoulder and ask his forgiveness.

"I'm sorry, Stealthy," said Dayton when he heard all that Hooker let out of reservation. "I'm downright sorry for you. I'll not hide from you that you've handed me a big lead. But aside from news profit, the angle you've supplied as one of your compelling motives eases my conscience about giving you that break—an even break, at least—on condition that——"

"Had to be a string to it!" Stealthy broke in bitterly.

"Well, I'll give you alternatives, Hooker. If you fail to act on what I offer—say, as advice—the district attorney gets my story to-night and the police get *you*. Do exactly what I want and the D. A. doesn't hear from me till, say, 2 P. M. to-morrow. I might not have all my facts in order before that time—see?"

"To-morrow's Saturday," said the Rounder with a touch of eagerness. "The D. A. prob'ly leaves his office at noon, even if he comes down at all Saturdays. So you could easy make it—Monday."

"I'll see to it that he's there at two—*to-morrow*," said Dayton, "even if I have to drag him from an uptown club. But I'm glad you remembered that. His possible absence might account for my slight tardiness in handing over your signed confession clearing Grell and charging yourself.

"Don't go off half-cock, now!" as Hooker again started to his feet in panic. "You'll be beyond recall—if you're smart—by that time. At least, you'll be a fugitive from justice and giving the police a chance to do a little work on this case. To-morrow, as you remind me, is Saturday. Now I'll remind *you* that Saturday is sailing day for half the steamships in New York Harbor. Have you got, say, fifty dollars?"

"I could mebbe scrape it up," mumbled Stealthy, who had Bancroft's five hundred in his pocket at that moment, in cash ready for emergency.

"All right. Fifty dollars will take you to the British West Indies—or even Europe. Take a cheap boat. Avoid anything carrying this wireless system. Lots of ships are installing it. Anyway, nearly all of them sail around noon. Don't tell *me* what plan you make, or the destination you head for as a first jump to somewhere else. I'd feel duty bound to tell."

"Dickie, you're—you're givin' me the break, all right!" gulped the Rounder.

"A start, let's call it. That's all. I don't want to be in the death house at Sing Sing covering the execution of a man I put in that chair myself. Anyway—that's the ultimatum. Do I call in the police and the D. A. to-night? Or are there some loose ends of this yarn that might reasonably retard its release until two o'clock to-morrow afternoon?"

"It's your say, Dickie, old man. Just gimme a chance. I never had a chance in my life."

"All right. You'll have it—after you sign what I'll write and read to you before a witness."

"A witness! He'd leak!"

"Barrie won't—if he values the job he's yearning for. Come on up to Casey's back room, where there's a table and some light. Don't matter if anybody else is there. I'll write. You'll read. So will Barrie. Then you'll sign and he'll witness. Come on! We'll pick up the cub at the House."

It took an hour to draft, revise, and finally copy the document which Melville Hooker signed. Casey, Bisco, Drane, and a sucker were playing poker at another table in the back room. The plain-clothes pair thought Hooker, Dayton, and that young cub merely had their heads together over some news story. Yes, a news story it was, as they were to learn, not from the *Sentinel* next day, but two mornings later—the Sunday morning—when it appeared in print.

"All right. You can go now, Hooker," said Dayton when the job was done. His manner was suddenly stiff.

They were on the sidewalk at Casey's corner, the Rounder and the *Sentinel* man facing each other in the light slanting from the saloon window. Barrie had scurried back to the neglected House at Dayton's order.

"So long," said Stealthy, holding out a still trembling right hand. "We been pretty good friends, you an' me, at that. Will you shake?"

Dayton looked down at the hand that had sped two bullets into a living, breathing human body. He momentarily hesitated. Then he thought of Villiers

Smythe and Jennie O'Neill—and Felix and Kate O'Neill—and Margaret.

"I'm no prig, Hooker," said he. "And I'm mighty sorry for you—in a way." He gave the other's hand a brief shake. "Good-bye!—and here's hoping you make good on the start—'n' everything. It's your legs or your life. Beat it!"

Chapter XXXII

THE HOUSE OF DELIRIUM

OREN GRELL opened his eyes—and closed them again. For a few minutes he suffered the delusion that all of him that had been mortal was dead and that part which is undying was in Gehenna.

The air was hot and thick in this wide, cavernous, dim-lit place which he had momentarily glimpsed. The ceiling was low, seeming almost to press down upon him. And from about him, near and distant, strange mutterings, whimperings, senseless reiterations, sudden cries, shouts, even yells—all of fear—made for a continuous swelling and dying torrent of sound.

He opened his eyes again. All about the low, cavernous-like place white slabs were ranged against the walls. On each slab was a figure either as still as death or writhing and tossing like a soul in torment. Ghosts in white flitted here and there. To Grell's immediate right a snowy-clad figure sat at a board on which was the Book of Judgment.

Then he saw that the keeper of the book was a woman nurse. She was altogether too buxom and muscular to be a ghost. The flitting phantoms were doctors and nurses in white uniforms. The slabs were hospital beds, and he himself was on one of them.

Gradually his brain cleared and he remembered

things—some things. Mainly he realized that he had been very drunk, or very ill—not himself, as he saw that other self now. Dayton and a girl—Dolly, or Margaret, or Mrs. Johnson—he was confused on the point—had brought him to this place. Before that—there was a vague, uneasy suggestion that he had killed somebody. At least, he had had the idea of killing somebody. Just why, he could not even imagine now.

There was a sudden shriek from a bed at the far end of the place. It was so piercing, so charged with mortal terror, that it rose high above the volume of babbling, muttering, and whimpering. The head night nurse—the Amazon-like woman at the desk—looked up quickly!

“No. 22 again!” she said sharply.

A couple of young internes in neat suits of white drill made a dash to grapple with a wild-eyed figure that had shot out of bed and was now running about, pursued by things imaginary. The man was quieted by sharp words and strong hands and induced to lie down again. The torrent-like flow of mutterings, wailings, and fear-ridden exclamations resumed its swelling and dying volume.

A girl in a practical nurse's uniform was handing an index card to the Amazon at the desk. Grell was about to cry out, address this girl by name, when the young nurse placed a finger casually over her lips. The head night nurse was looking down at the “Book of Judgment.” Grell understood. He remembered more, now that he saw Margaret O'Neill standing there. He must not appear to know her. She must not reveal that she knew him. But there was comfort

in the knowledge of her near presence. He remembered now something Dayton had said. She was a nurse at Bellevue. It was she who had brought him here. Why? His name was Johnson, wasn't it? And he would be arrested for murder if he betrayed himself as Oren Grell. It was something like that. He must not know her—as Margaret—the girl who had rescued him from the streets. Then—suddenly—

"Margaret!" cried a gasping voice from somewhere in the ward. In that instant Grell believed—so high was the tension of his brain; so insecure his grip upon himself—that his own voice had cried the name his other faculties were bidding him remember to forget.

At the uttered name the young nurse started and looked far over to her left, to the beds against the east wall.

"What was that, Miss Royer?" she asked the night nurse in a startled manner.

"He's none of yours, Miss Chester. An A. P. case. Brought in this morning. He'll die."

"Margaret!" again came the hoarse, gasping cry.

"Oh! He's calling *me*!"

"Nonsense, Miss Chester! What makes you like that? You've been on edge all day. Miss Terry says you dropped a hypo, then borrowed and broke her thermometer."

But Margaret was not listening. She had turned and gone swiftly toward the source of that cry. Grell was watching her. He saw her disappear behind a folding screen significantly shielding a bed from general view. Presently the girl came back, her face drawn in some strange agony. She slowly approached

the night nurse's desk and for a moment supported herself against it with a gripping hand.

"What is it now, Miss Chester?" Miss Royer asked irritably.

"Will you please, Miss Royer, let me have No. 67 to nurse?"

"Why? He's none of yours?"

"He is. He's—my father."

The Amazon looked up—stared. Then swiftly she ran her fingers over the card index and extracted No. 67. There was no name or address; merely the entry, "Police Prec. 22. No Info. Picked up 9th Ave." and opposite *Diagnosis*: "Alcoh.—Alcoh.—Pneum."

"Are you sure?" asked the night nurse, gazing at "Miss Chester" with mingled amazement and sympathy.

"Yes. I've always feared he would end up here some night."

"Good heavens! What a circumstance!"

"Margaret!" cried the hoarse, gasping voice. "Where's Marg'ret? Away wid yez, Kate! It's me little Marg'ret I'm wantin'!"

"But—your first name is Rose," said Miss Royer.

"He—always called me Margaret. It's—my middle name."

"Extraordinary! Never heard of such a coincidence. Yet—not so extraordinary, at that, if the father's a heavy drinker and the daughter a nurse in Ward Thirty-two. It just hasn't happened till now."

"Let me nurse him, Miss Royer, please!"

"Certainly you may, my child. He's got a special

nurse now, Miss Coleman. He will probably——He's seriously ill. But you may do all that can be done——under Dr. Herne's orders. Take over Miss Colman's chart and send her to me. I'll put her on your section, though she won't like it——till I explain."

Two minutes later Margaret sat behind the screen——the ominous screen in an open ward. She took the cold hand of No. 67 in hers. Only the patient's extremities were cold; the rest of the man was burning with fever.

"Marg'ret!" muttered Felix O'Neil. "I want Marg'ret. Aw, Central——ye've gi'n me the wrong number again."

Margaret, her eyes brimming with tears, quickly bent close to the delirious man's ear and said something softly.

"Marg'ret," Felix seemed consciously to answer with a sigh of relief. "Ye're a good girl, Marg'ret. Damn' liars they are, all av thim! Ye'll take care av yer owld Dad, Marg'ret. Then I'll be all right, Marg'ret . . . all right . . . little Marg'ret . . ."

The night nurse and the night physician in charge were talking together.

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard!" Miss Royer was saying. "He turns out to be her own father!"

"Luckiest thing ever," said Dr. Herne with a chuckle. "He seems to know his nurse is the Margaret he's been calling for. I wouldn't have bet a bad nickel on his chance of pulling through the night. But now, I dunno. He's Irish and he's tough. And she's

the medicine may turn the trick. She was supposed to go off at seven-thirty, but she insisted on staying through. A damn' fine girl, if you ask me! Hello! Who's with us now?"

An attendant from the hospital office had been admitted by the steel door, where one giant Cerberus had relieved another at 8 P. M. With the attendant was a heavy-set person who walked as if he had once worn a uniform and pounded pavements with his feet.

"Another policeman," said Miss Royer. "Been several in, looking for this Grell man who's wanted in a Tenderloin shooting. There's the last edition, Doctor, if you have nothing better to do."

Dr. Herne withdrew with the newspaper to a seat near the night nurse's desk. He did not like policemen. The heavy-footed man was introduced to Miss Royer by the office attendant as Detective Sergeant BurrIDGE, of central office.

"I'll take a look around, lady," said BurrIDGE, "while you'll maybe check up your list an' see if you've got anything answering this description."

He handed the nurse a typewritten slip and himself started a cruise about the ward. Miss Royer found no name like Grell in the card index and did not bother herself beyond that. By the time BurrIDGE got to No. 11, having made the whole circuit before that, Grell, who had heard his name mentioned by Miss Royer, was in a condition bordering upon nervous collapse. BurrIDGE paused at the foot of the bed and thoughtfully turned his tobacco quid. He studied the face of a youngish man, whose youth, nevertheless, was effectively disguised under a black eye, several days'

growth of unshaven hair and all the general disfigurement of a recent debauch.

"What's yer name, you?" Burrridge gruffly demanded to know.

The response was not quite coherent, but it was clear enough in one way to Mr. Burrridge.

"He thinks he can fool me," Grell muttered on inspiration. "But I'm on to him, Doc, I'm on! He's got a bolo knife under his pillow, an' followed me all the way from Coney——"

"Hey, Mister, Mister!" whispered a hoarse voice from the next bed. "It's *him* that's got a bolo knife! Lend me a gun, will ya, len' me a gun! I gotta defend muhself."

"Geel!" muttered Burrridge, turning away with a shiver. But at Miss Royer's desk, after learning that no Grell or any person answering his description was indexed, the detective jerked a thumb toward No. 11.

"Who's that guy?"

"No. 11 is—Johnson," she read from an index card. "Next-of-kin—wife, who brought him in for treatment. Want her address?"

"Got a wife, huh? That let's him out, I guess. Got any patients has Blankton cigarettes in their pockets when they come in?"

"Blanktons!" laughed Miss Royer. "Everybody smokes them—even the doctor here. They're as common as literary supplements on an 'L'-station platform."

Burrridge presently departed. He had not expected to find his man here. He had merely been following routine procedure. He inclined more, himself to spe-

cialized procedure, although that cigarette didn't seem to be panning out as he had hoped it would.

The instant Burrige was beyond the steel door Grell's nerves gave way. He sat bolt upright in bed and began to gasp for breath. His bolo-fearing neighbour sat up, too, prepared to withstand attack.

"Lie down, both of you!" commanded the Amazonian night nurse.

But Dr. Herne, hearing that familiar gasping, put aside his newspaper and a cigarette he had been surreptitiously smoking behind it, and came to Grell's side.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" he asked in his easy, smiling manner.

"Doctor," Grell controlled himself enough to articulate, "I—hate to make a nuisance of myself—but—I'm not used to this. I mean—it's a new and humiliating business for me."

"Say, Doc, lis'en to me!" broke in the fellow on the next bed. "That fella's got a bolo knife——"

"You shut up, or you'll get another dose from the Black Bottle!" snapped the doctor. Patient No. 12 subsided and lay down. Even the doctor was siding with that ripper!

"What college?" Dr. Herne asked with his quiet smile, turning again to Grell. Nothing surprised the medico in this house of delirium. Accidents happened even to the most temperate. But Herne was always interested.

"I'm not claiming any special consideration," said Grell. "Only—I feel—if I could get a little sleep—get away from this babble—all it means—I might be all right in the morning."

"You're fairly all right now," said the doctor. "Otherwise you wouldn't make such a reasonable suggestion. How the devil did *you* get in a mess like this?"

"I—I——"

"All right. Don't tell me. Sorry! And don't take it too much to heart. You're not the first of your kind. You'd be surprised. I'll bring you something."

Dr. Herne returned from the dispensary presently with a very small glass containing a heavy, faintly greenish liquid.

"It'll taste like rotten eggs. But it'll do the work."

Grell drank it. The stuff—peraldehyde—was horrible. Dr. Herne lingered, sitting on the edge of the bed, chatting lightly, watching closely. Presently Patient No. 11 mumbled his responses. When he failed to answer a question as to how he felt now, Dr. Herne smiled and slipped away, leaving Grell in a sleep which was to carry him through the remainder of the night in that house of delirium, sometimes called the Zoo.

Before he resumed his newspaper and the forbidden cigarette, Dr. Herne made a round of the ward. He peeped behind the screen that partly surrounded Patient No. 67—the nameless patient who had been brought in from Police Precinct 22. He was still delirious, but was holding his own. Also, although practically unconscious, he was instinctively holding the hand of his nurse, Miss Chester.

A good thing the screen was up, Herne reflected with his queer little smile; for the nurse's head had drooped forward on the pillow beside her father's face, and she was sound asleep.

Chapter XXXIII

DAYTON BOSSES THE JOB

W. TILSON JERROLD, District Attorney of New York, was in a resentful mood when he reached his offices in Centre Street. It was a few minutes after two on the afternoon of a Saturday which was to have begun with a long-anticipated Scotch curling game on ice, at Utica. The D. A., though not the game, had been called off just because the New York *Sentinel*, about three o'clock that morning, had located his whereabouts and suggested over long-distance telephone that it would be for the best interests of justice in the Villiers Smythe case if Mr. Jerrold would be in his office in the Criminal Courts Building at 2 P. M. that day.

Had it been the *Quirinal*, or the *Sphere*, Mr. Jerrold would even more have resented this upset of his recreational plans. But the *Sentinel* had supported him to victory in the last election, despite the *Sphere's* daily cartoon showing the District Attorney of New York playing ping-pong, or whist, or with a mint julep in one hand and a golf club in the other. Also, this Villiers Smythe case and some previous matters directly or indirectly connected with it were causing Mr. Jerrold considerable thought.

He apologized to the Mayor of Utica, who had

fathered the all-interurban curling match, and caught a fast train to the metropolis. But he was still quite unamiable when he entered the Criminal Courts Building, which was as deserted as a baseball grand stand in a snowstorm.

This was fortunate in a way. For neither were there any newspaper men about to note and speculate on the mighty Jerrold's return on a Saturday afternoon. The day and the hour were fortunate for Dayton, too. He might be able to accomplish his purpose and at the same time keep the story of it for exclusive printing in the *Sentinel*.

That young man was waiting before the hall door of the district attorney's private office. He was accompanied by Barrie; also a worried-looking man named Phidias, and an elderly gentleman at whose name Mr. Jerrold pricked his ears.

"Ah!—Grell?" He glanced at Dayton. "Father?"

"Just so."

"Come in," said the D. A. with sudden briskness. He unlocked the private door and herded his visitors inside.

"Now, then, Mr. Dayton—make good!" said he, lighting a cigarette after passing a box of them around. "Just what drags me from week-end recreation?"

From a hip pocket Dayton drew a revolver and placed it on the desk before the district attorney.

"There's the gun that killed Villiers Smythe," said he.

From a pocket of his coat he took a rolled-up and much-battered felt hat of a collegiate shape.

"Here's the hat the murderer wore. It's Grell's hat, although he did not do the shooting. There's another hat to come, the hat the real murderer was *not* wearing at the time of the shooting. You can have his room searched, although it won't matter if he burned the hat before buying a new one, because——"

Dayton placed a large envelope on the desk. It contained a small quantity of tobacco shreds in a pill box, an opened package of cigarettes of a familiar brand and a slip of paper with some writing on it.

"Because," Dayton continued, "the man who actually did the shooting smoked drugged cigarettes in the areaway of the Chartres and left a couple of butts. Policeman Phidias, here, and Mr. Barrie, my assistant, will tell you more about that when we get down to detail.

"Finally," he went on, taking several folded sheets of writing from an inside pocket, "here is the signed and witnessed confession of the actual murderer—and it absolutely clears Grell."

"Wellabedam'd!" said Mr. Jerrold inelegantly, as he snatched up the document and rapidly glanced over its contents. Then—"When was this statement obtained?—at what hour? It's dated today."

"Well, it *was* to-day—a few minutes after midnight, this morning."

"Dammit! Why——?" began the D.A. But then he shut up. If the *Sphere* got hold of this, the cartoon might be of a curling stone and a bottle of Scotch, on ice with the District Attorney of New York.

"Very well. This is interesting, Dayton," he sub-

stituted, glancing speculatively at Phidias, Barrie, and Mr. Peter Grell. "I think I must ask you other gentlemen to step into the next room while I hear Mr. Dayton's detailed story. You, too, Mr. Grell. But don't worry, sir. If this is as it appears to be on the once-over, your anxieties may be at an end, p.d.q."

Jerrold, after escorting the other three into an adjoining room and deliberately locking them in, was frowning heavily as he returned to Dayton.

"The devil!" he exclaimed angrily. "Why, instead of being so confoundedly mysterious over long distance, didn't you spit out what you'd *got*? I'd have ordered a special after wiring certain instructions. *Now*, twelve hours after the signing of this confession—*where's Hooker*? Taking his ease in the Metropole, I suppose!"

"That's police work," said Dayton coolly. "I had some loose ends to tie up, let's say. You—let's further say—had a curling match on hand."

Jerrold's face reddened, then paled and grew belligerent. For a few seconds eyes battled eyes. Then Dayton grinned. The D.A. presently smiled wryly.

"All right. As you say, it's up to the police to get him, after I indict him. And——" He paused, sat down at his desk and began thoughtfully to play with a rubber eraser. "It's just possible I'm not over-anxious to get this fellow—right away—after all—maybe. If it can be fixed so the newspapers"—he looked significantly at Dayton—"are satisfied that all efforts are being made to locate Hooker—get him extradited, if necessary; for I've no doubt he's making time for somewhere out of jurisdiction. Yes, I

hope it can ride along for a bit like that!" he concluded with a certain decisiveness.

"Hoping we'll get the man higher up?" Dayton suggested.

"Exactly. Does your guess happen to coincide with mine?"

"Is its name Bancroft?"

"You're wise! I've had him marked down ever since this Villiers business began, but haven't got a thing on him to date. He's clever, but he'll trip up on that same cleverness, mark me! In the meantime, let's all go to sleep and"—with a grin—"play curling games and gather up loose ends while Mr. Bancroft puts that Smythe estate through probate for the widow's benefit. Then, watch!"

"It's a long lane that has no turning," quoth the reporter.

"There *is* one—always. All right! While Hooker makes his get-away, let's consider this evidence of yours, with all due respect for the law's alleged leisurely procedure. I'm set. Begin."

Dayton told his story, marshalling his facts in proper order.

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"Fine! But where's the woman who saw this hat business and took Grell to her room?" asked the district attorney, when all had been laid before him.

"She's sitting guard over him until you're ready to say he can travel without the aid of a patrol wagon. You can take her testimony then."

"I'll want it, though I may not need it. I'll have Phidias and Barrie in now."

This was done. Dayton, in his story, had frankly stated that he himself had found the cigarette and had had it analyzed, but that he wished to throw credit for finding the clue to a policeman who, suspended for alleged dereliction of duty in one phase of this matter, might be reinstated for "meritorious work" in another.

"Do as you please about that," said the D.A. with a chuckle. "But I'd like to see Burrige's face when he sees it in print. He'll come up here with a howl and the other cigarette butt. I'll be glad to add the latter to the other exhibits, with thanks to Woodenhead Burrige for his suddenly significant contribution."

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"Well that's all!" said the district attorney, after he had heard the suspended policeman's tale and Barrie's confirmation of the cigarette-snatching incident in the House of the Two Green Eyes. "Shooting Mystery Solved! In further newspaper parlance, the murderer, Hooker, is still at large, but the police expect to arrest him at any moment, although it is admitted he may have escaped to Canada, or Mexico, in which case extradition papers——"

"Come in, Mr. Grell!" Jerrold broke off, calling through a doorway and himself returning with a hand on the arm of the banker from Rochester. "There's a warrant out for your son's arrest. But Dayton, here, will produce him. After a brief private hearing before a magistrate and the presentation of certain conclusive evidence this bright young man has un-

earthed, you probably can take your son home to Rochester with you—wiser for being sadder, perhaps.”

“My son, then, is cleared?” cried Grell, senior, his voice quivering with repressed emotion.

“Absolutely, thanks to our mutual friend here. Perhaps you can get Dayton to say—he won’t tell me—where he’s got the boy holed up.”

“I’ll tell anybody—now,” said Dayton, by way of heading off a grateful parent. “He’s in Ward 32, Bellevue.”

“Alcoholic ward!” exclaimed Jerrold. “Young man, I hand it to you! Bright—very bright! Well, let’s get him out of that menagerie.”

It was between four and five in the evening when the steel door of Ward 32 was swung open and Richard Dayton, accompanied by an attendant from the hospital office, entered. Grell, attired in a washed-out bathrobe and sitting on the edge of Bed No. 11, started to his feet with a cry of relief.

“Thank God, Dickie! Get me out of this mad-house!”

“Where’s Margaret?” Dayton asking, unheeding the personal plea. “I was scared to death until a nurse at her rooming house told me her father was here and she hadn’t been off duty since noon yesterday.”

“Yes. She’s over there, behind the screen, Number Sixty-seven. She’s the ward’s heroine.”

“How about yourself? Seen any snakes?”—with a grin.

"No. Nothing like that, thank God! But I may be seeing things soon if I don't get out of here!"

"All right. You've been cleared. Your father's waiting for you out in the office."

"Dad!"

"Excuse me a minute," said Dayton, leaving Grell to his own reflections and going to the desk where the nurse in charge—not Miss Royer at this hour—was asking the attendant:

"Where's the wife—Mrs. Johnson? She's supposed to appear in person before I can let him go."

"The office will be responsible, Miss Jensen," said the attendant. "Between ourselves, it's a request from the district attorney's office—if he's able to be moved, even in a carriage."

"Oh, *he's* all right. Don't know why they brought him here in the first place. The man's a gentleman, and there are other places for his kind. However, out he goes, so far as I'm concerned."

That was enough for Dayton, who overheard. Explanations were unnecessary. The nurse had called a ward orderly to see that No. 11 be given his clothes and made ready for discharge. While this was being put under way, Dayton asked Miss Jensen's permission to speak with Miss Rose Chester.

"You are a newspaper man?" said the day nurse in charge, narrowing her eyes. She thought she knew the type.

"Yes."

"Well, if you print that story about Miss Chester—fine as it is—you ought to be put up against a wall and shot! How did you get in here, anyway?"

"Office permit. Not to get *that* story, though. You can do the shooting yourself if I print it. I'm not making any such publicity for my wife."

"Your *wife*!"

"Well, I haven't mentioned the relationship to her, as yet. But I'd like to get her used to a little bossing in advance."

"Oh!" said the nurse, looking up into a pair of earnest gray eyes and suddenly sensing Romance. "I believe a little bossing—from the right person—might not hurt her right now. Behind that screen, 67. There's no reason on earth why she shouldn't leave her father now. He's turned the corner."

Dayton heard that as he was moving across the wide, cavernous-like room in which sounds by day were as a minor stream's murmur compared with a torrent's night roar.

Margaret's wan face lighted when she saw who it was. But quickly she clapped a hand over the visitor's mouth. Felix was asleep, in a deep, natural sleep.

As she had laid hands on Richard, Richard promptly retaliated. Her tiredness, and his knowledge of what she had undergone, appealed to all that was manliest in him.

"Nurse out there says he can be left in good hands while you go home and sleep, Margaret," he whispered. "Get ready to go."

"But I can't. I won't." She was aware that her right hand lay in his left, and that his right arm encircled her waist.

"You shall! I'm boss from now on. I love you, Margaret. You know that! And you love me, don't

you, now? That's why I'm bossing. Lordy! I never dreamed I'd make my declaration in an alcoholic ward. It's a funny world, isn't it?"

She did not resist when he quietly kissed her. She even slipped an arm about his neck by way of assisting to that consummation.

"Get your things," ordered the boss. "You're going home with me—to your mother."

Before leaving the district attorney's office Dayton had said to Jerrold:

"Do I get all this to myself—as a newspaper man?"

"I don't see any other newspaper men around, except your assistant, here," said the D.A. solemnly. "But be careful what you print and don't print."

"What you don't is the higher art of journalism," chuckled Dayton.

"You might find yourself in a hole; aiding and abetting escape, accessory after——"

"A curling match!" flashed the *Sentinel* man with a grin. Jerrold blushed, but grinned, too. They shook hands.

Perhaps it was because they shook hands that next day the D.A. confirmed every detail of the story which appeared in the *Sentinel* as Dayton's biggest scoop.

"How come the *Sentinel* got the story and the rest of us didn't?" inquired a *Sphere* reporter who was in the press crowd that invaded the official's residence next morning before W. Tilson Jerrold was well out of his bath.

"It was the *Sentinel's* own well-deserved story, and the *Sentinel* was entitled to print it without asking my

permission. No other paper asked me for it. If you want anything from the district attorney's office, it's customary to come and get it, isn't it?"

"Well, how about this cop, Phidias, gettin' credit for findin' the doped cigarette clue when Burrridge found it first?" asked a *Quirinal* man.

"There were two cigarette ends. Possibly Burrridge hadn't brains enough to know what to do with his end when he found it," said Jerrold. "Never dreamed it was doctored with *cannabis indica* until the *Sentinel* printed a chemist's analysis."

"Seems queer you didn't make any move to get after Hooker until nearly twenty-four hours after he signed a confession," said a *Clarion* man.

"The confession was not brought to my attention until at least twelve hours after it was signed. You'll have to query the *Sentinel* on that point," said the district attorney, who had perfect confidence in Dayton's ability to answer any question—discreetly.

But Dayton was never questioned particularly on that point. The others knew—as all newspaper men know—that there are moments when silence and inaction are golden producers of ultimate scoops, beats, and column space.

"Glad Phiddy saved his bacon," said the Sphinx in the House of the Two Green Eyes that night.

"He's on post again," said Sergeant Remmers. "Orders from the police commissioner. Friend Dayton done him proud."

"Where's Dayton, anyway?" the Sphinx asked Barrie, who was *not* substituting.

"Spending the evening with his best girl," said Barrie lightly. The graduate from cubdom was happy. Dayton was henceforth to be a main office star. He, Thomas Lemuel Barrie, was at last the *Sentinel's* regular Tenderloin man.

But Dayton was not spending the evening with his best girl. He was sitting alone in his rooms in Forty-fifth Street, attired in a bathrobe, doing nothing but watch smoke rings ascend to the ceiling while he smiled and smiled. For he was experiencing a happiness that was new to him, an utter contentment with prospective existence in this best of all worlds.

Margaret, after a night and part of a day with her mother, was back on duty—special duty—in Ward 32. Felix was going to get well.

"And he'll never drink again, Mother," Margaret had said. "He promised that when he knew me."

"Marg'ret, oh, is it——? Will he kape his word?"

"Something tells me he will," said the daughter who had dragged Felix O'Neill back from the Dark Edge.

And, incredible as it may seem, Felix O'Neill did keep that word. Whenever he felt the old, wild gnawing at his stomach, he just looked at Margaret, or thought of her, and refrained.

And while New York was buzzing over Dayton's big scoop—that is, the sensational revelation it contained, solving many things, including Louis Villiers's relationship to the whole business—J. Loudon Bancroft found himself remarkably cool and collected and with a feeling of vast satisfaction that he appeared only as a minor figure in the background of the printed

tale. Then, too, he had had a few moments' talk over the telephone with Melville Hooker, just a few words before a certain steamship left port on the Saturday.

"He made his bed, poor fool! Now he can sleep in it," murmured Mr. Bancroft in his comfortable apartments in West Fifty-sixth Street.

"The fool" he referred to may have been the "Henry S. Thomson" to whom was made payable a draft which Bancroft was enclosing in an envelope drawn on an international bank at Port of Spain, Trinidad, British West Indies.

Chapter XXXIV.

THE LINE OF DUTY

SOME writers of fiction may tell you that Truth is a poor artist in the matter of reasonable beginnings and satisfactory endings. Young reporters—dealers in actual happenings—may tell you that in real life stories fail to work out to that ending which should be as desirably neat as a bow tie. But your old-timer, whose brain is a storehouse filled with the news of many yesterdays, can prove by instances that there is a clearly defined and poetically just ending to every story in real life—if you wait long enough—and recognize that ending when it arrives.

It may be years before the last link is forged. It may be the greater part of a lifetime, even if all who were contemporary are not dead and buried. In this particular case it was only five months; although the story and the culminating link might have escaped publicity altogether had not two rival newspaper men happened to notice a small item insignificantly buried at the bottom of an inside column.

To be exact, it was on the same day that Richard Dayton married Margaret O'Neill.

A large quantity of water had slipped past the Statue of Liberty in the meantime. For one thing, Bisco and Drane were no longer on the police force.

They knew *what*, but never *who*, hit them. One thing only was certain to them: that one night when they had just applied that *n*th degree, known as the shake-down, a couple of men from the district attorney's office pounced on them from an adjacent alley. Result: The police commissioner inflicted the extreme penalty within his power. He broke them, and he advertised the fact, for the good of the service. The girl victim who appeared as principal witness with the D. A.'s men was neither Margaret O'Neill nor her twin sister, Dolly Carnation. Yet Dayton took occasion to scribble a brief note of understanding appreciation to his new and warm friend, W. Tilson Jerrold, District Attorney of New York.

Dolly Carnation? She apparently left New York after the publicity attending her name in connection with the Smythe case. That name was not Jennie O'Neill. Her real identity never appeared—in print, at least. Dayton had an idea that she went out to the "sticks" with a third-rate "leg show." Anyway, she never reappeared to cause further sorrow and shame to her people, who considered her, in time, as one who had died and been given Christian burial. The memory of her was as an old wound that aches once in a while. But Time dulls even an ache.

Melville Hooker had not been captured. The public had almost forgotten that his arrest was still in order. Therefore the police were willing to slow up in zealous activities, despite that it was current rumour about the Metropole café that the Rounder had recently been seen around the race track in Havana, Cuba. He seemed to be enjoying Latin-American life,

report said, except when the band played George Cohan's latest, "Give My Regards to Broadway." Then Stealthy would reach for a cigarette, inhale smoke, and exhale a sigh. He was said to derive a steady income from some source—perhaps as a race-track tout.

Bancroft, several weeks after the shooting of Villiers Smythe, filed a will for probate. The beneficiary was the widow. It was known and admitted that the deceased had an illegitimate brother living, but that brother made no claim to a share of the estate originally inherited from his mother. Anyway, his whereabouts was "unknown" and he was under an indictment charging him with the murder of the deceased whose will was now offered.

Probate was granted. Mrs. Frances Villiers Smythe inherited a million dollars. Bancroft was secretly surprised, though openly gratified, that the surrogate, the same old surrogate, raised no question to obstruct or delay the passage of the will. In fact, the judge seemed somewhat weary that day, as if he had been out late the night before. He just sat there on the bench with a gloomy, brooding eye fixed on the lawyer, and—in the end—granted probate with little more than a grunt and a nod.

As a matter of fact, the surrogate *had* been up late the night before with the District Attorney of New York, who was notorious (see *Sphere* editorials and cartoons) as a lover of life and living outside of his office.

It was in the merry month of May that Richard Dayton and Margaret O'Neill joined hands. It was

a seclusive, more than exclusive, wedding. Dayton had had all the back-slapping he could stand before the actual event. His bride, by the way, was the recipient of a heavy set of solid silver from the *Sentinel's* editorial staff. She also received a grand piano from a Mr. Peter Grell, whose son came down from Rochester to be second-best man—and only other second present besides Felix O'Neill, who looked on this occasion more like a Senator (Irish) than a teamster (also Irish). Young Oren Grell, clean-skinned and refined-looking again, confided something to Dayton and his bride which pleased them more than any wedding gift. It was about a girl in Rochester, and . . .

"I'm just as lucky as you are, Dickie," said the youth who had bought a ham and seen life. "The Governor is tickled stiff. But, what's become of—you know?"

"Don't know," said Dayton. "She dropped out of probation work for good. In Florida, I believe, or abroad somewhere. Not in town, anyway."

Spring in the Adirondacks is a marvellous thing. It was to Lake Placid that Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dayton started in the Montreal Express at the close of their wedding day. Nobody saw them off. Dayton had seen to that.

They had a drawing room—the first either had ever occupied. Into it Dayton brought candy, fruit, and magazines for the bride, and the latest afternoon paper for himself. He did not expect to read the latter; it was merely the mechanical indulgence of a habit. He never even glanced at it until he went to the smoker, leaving the drawing room to a girl whose

heart was singing its own song. Dayton hardly knew what he was reading in that smoker. He carelessly turned the pages of a sheet, glancing disinterestedly at this head and that. "Bomb in the Subway!"—"Swallows False Teeth; Rushed to Hospital"—"Lillian Russell's Views on a Fifty-Cent Dinner" . . . What could there be in such stuff to interest people? If, now, the Montreal Express crashed—*that* would be news of interest—to Richard Dayton, at least.

Then the item, not more than three or four lines at the bottom of an inside column, seemed to fly up and hit him between the eyes:

MRS. BANCROFT DEAD IN FRANCE

PARIS, May 11 (A. P.): Mrs. J. Loudon Bancroft, of New York, died here to-day of heart failure. Her husband, a New York attorney, was present. They had been married only a few months, arriving here yesterday from Nice.

"*Ha!*" exclaimed Dayton, starting to his feet.

He was not alone in the smoker. Followed by a curious stare from other males, who thought his behaviour odd, he went out into the corridor and paced up and down, greatly agitated and rattled!

"Ye gods! On my wedding night, too!" he muttered. "They must have slipped away—together or separately—don't matter. Quietly married in Europe."

Now she was dead, she that had been Frances Kimball, probation lady. He had not a doubt of "Mrs. Bancroft's" identity. Nor had he the slightest doubt that she had made a will in J. Loudon Bancroft's favour, naming him as executor, too!

"But he's bungled, for once!" Dayton assured him-

self. "How could he have been such a damned fool? Wife dead of heart failure! That's a bit too thin, Bancroft, too thin! What's the matter with the man?"

The train had passed Poughkeepsie. At Albany, after telling his bride that he had forgotten something and had to file a telegram, Dayton personally gave a written message to the Western Union operator in the railway station. Then, returning to the drawing room, he put the matter out of his mind until sometime before dawn, when the conductor came tapping on the door and, with apologies, said:

"You Mr. Dayton of the New York *Sentinel*? Well, here's a dispatch for you, and we've got orders to hold the train while you get your things together. The southbound express should be here soon. You won't have to wait long."

"I knew it!" groaned Dayton, tearing open the yellow envelope.

Message received. Sorry. You did it yourself. Honeymoon called off. Return at once. Train being held. Will give you a month later.

Sentinel.

For a few moments Dayton was stunned, sick with disappointment. Then the call to duty sounded again in his professional bosom. He handed the message to Margaret. She read it while he threw things into a suitcase.

"You go on to Placid, sweetheart," said the bridegroom. "It'll only be a day or two, and——"

"No, my dear," said his bride, reaching for a brand-new kimono. "'Whither thou goest . . .' And to

think the New York Central gets held up just because my husband is needed in New York!"

"Dayton, I've got a bad conscience!" announced District Attorney Jerrold when the bridegroom appeared in the Center Street offices shortly before noon.

"I should think you and the *Sentinel* would have," said the victim of an interrupted honeymoon.

"Oh—that?" grinned the D. A. "You'll be all the happier in the end. But—" his face became grave—"when the *Sentinel* got your wire and called me up I saw the thing just as I suppose you did. The worst of it is, it isn't just between you and me and the *Sentinel*. The *Clarion* is on the trail, too. A man named Deeming."

"Deeming, yes. I know him."

"Deeming nailed the item as you did. The others have missed it, so far."

"They'll continue to miss it if they haven't been after you before this. Is that all that's worrying you—your conscience?"

"Not at all, not that. But—I feel in a measure—this woman's death—I might have averted it if I'd not played the waiting game. You see, I had a long talk with the surrogate some months ago. He agreed with me that it would be wise to let the will go through, *pro tem.* at least. I wanted to see if Bancroft would fulfill my expectation, marrying the fortune he's been juggling so long. And always I hoped some card would turn up in the next deal—something to play against his game. Until yesterday I had not a thing

on this fellow that was worth a row of pins. Then, yesterday——

“Well—I got what I wanted—more than I’d hoped for. I called up your office. I needed your evidence. They said you’d gone and gotten yourself married and were heading for parts unknown, although they believed the managing editor could locate you, if he wanted to. I decided I’d let you have a few days’ honeymoon, anyway. Then, late last night, your managing editor called *me* up. Your telegram from Albany—‘See *Evening Quirinal*. Sports Edition. Page five. Foot of Column four.’ *He* saw its significance, of course, right off. So did I. Bancroft’s put her away somehow just as he had old Mrs. Villiers put away, and maybe in a more subtle manner egged Hooker into removing Villiers Smythe. Only the damned fool must have lost his mind over there in France. It’s too raw to swallow!”

“Yes, it is. But you’re saying a lot, Jerrold, that I’ve been afraid to put in so many words myself. But what about yesterday? What card did you turn up before my telegram came?”

“Oh, I’ve *got* him. If I’d only got him twenty-four hours sooner his wife might not be dead. I wouldn’t have waited for you. I’d have cabled the Sûreté—French police——”

“What *have* you got?” Dayton put in impatiently.

For answer Jerrold pushed a button. To the uniformed officer who answered the summons, the D. A. said briskly:

“Tell ’em over in the Tombs to bring up The Red.”

“Yessir!”

"Of course, they'll delay the burial permit, or exhume the body. I've made that request by cable this morning," said the district attorney, walking restlessly up and down. "Secretly, of course. I don't want Bancroft to sniff hue and cry until they report on an autopsy. But doubtless the French authorities will act as circumstances point. They are officiously efficient—very! This other card I've turned up is enough, anyway, even if the Frenchman can't find evidence of foul play to warrant arresting and holding him. But I'm in doubt as to whether I ought not, at that. I've slipped twice in this business through lying low too long. I don't know. I waited for you. There seemed loads of time until this unexpected thing broke loose with your telegram of last night. Don't tell me coincidence ever cracks itself from overstrain. Rather say the mills of God——"

"For the Lord's sake, Jerrold——!"

"I'm coming to it, man! Listen! A certain ward boss didn't like somebody. Just the other night that somebody got bumped off by a fellow known as The Red, who's got an up-the-river record as a thug and a gunman. We all know what, and who, are behind it; but we're up against the usual hard wall of practical politics. Abe Hirschel, crook lawyer, is defending The Red. Well, Hirschel told me I might be able to convict the gunman but could never hope to get the politician. He hinted that if I'd let up on the whole thing, or at least guarantee The Red a term instead of the chair, this thug would trade something very much worth while to me. I said I'd examine the pig in the poke before trading. Yesterday I heard The Red's

story—without legal witnesses, of course—and I'm of half a mind to trade. This gunman—— Wait!"

There had come a tap on the door. At the D. A.'s word, a squat, gorilla-faced human brute with flaming red hair was brought into the office by two plain-clothes men whom Jerrold dismissed, bidding them remain just outside the door, in the corridor.

"Red," said the district attorney. "You still stick to that statement?"

"Sure, if de t'ing Abey wants goes with youse."

"So far nothing goes, or is in affidavit. But you stand trial for one killing or another—perhaps both in the end. It's for you to choose which you'll plead to at present. In the meantime—you stated that you killed old Mrs. Villiers in Washington Square Park and got paid for doing so by a man named Bancroft?"

"Maybe I did say it an' maybe I didn't, see?" sneered the red-haired gorilla, glancing suspiciously out of his eye corners at Dayton. "I'm deaf, dumb, an' blind without Abe Hirschel's in the same room, see?"

"That's all!" the D. A. snapped angrily. "Take him away," he added, to the plain-clothes men who had entered again in answer to the bell summons.

"There you are! You see what kind of deal I'm up against?" cried Jerrold. "By letting go my chance to expose the murderous methods of a certain type of ward politician I get my chance to put handcuffs on Bancroft, even if this death in Paris does *not* turn out to be another piece of his engineering. If that fails me, and in the meantime I have refused The Red as a trade bargain, I have nothing to *prove* that Bancroft was out to get the Villiers estate and disguised his open

tracks rather skilfully until he could legally marry the fortune, or get his hands on it through a minor crook like Hooker or a pitiable reed like Villiers Smythe. He married it in the end, it seems. That's why I'm amazed at the mere possibility of his having assisted his wife off the stage. It seems crude, for him. He had the money so long as he had *her*. I somehow can't rely on it as the turn of events that will make for Bancroft's exposure and conviction."

"This Red——" said Dayton at a tangent. "Too bad Bancroft didn't do the old lady job himself. It would have been easy. That's where he slipped, seems to me."

"Perhaps he had some sense of delicacy!" Jerrold said ironically. "But this professional assassin says it was to appear like a robbery for the old woman's jewellery. A policeman loomed up before The Red had a chance to get the stuff.

"But we're getting away from the question, which is—Do I trade with this shyster, Hirschel, who would save a dirty politician's scalp? Do I trade, and cable the French Sûreté to arrest and hold Bancroft for extradition to face a charge of murdering old Mrs. Villiers, or——"

"Haven't you as good as traded already?" put in the reporter.

"I have not!" Jerrold declared hotly. "At least, the deal's not closed. I thought I had Bancroft on his wife's death. Now—I'm not so sure."

"I see. You think it's too obvious to be true. The Red would get a life term in any case—on one murder

or the other—if you traded. Watch you don't fall between two stools while reaching for too much."

"You're right—though not the way *I* mean," said Jerrold grimly. "I'm done for as district attorney if I truckle to ward-politician murderers. No, sir! I'll take my chance of the Frenchmen putting the tag on Bancroft in this wife business. I'm going to follow the line of my duty just as it comes, by God!—asking no favours!—bargaining no bargains! Bancroft may wriggle out again, but——"

The desk telephone buzzed. Jerrold, responding, said: "Yes? Ah! Tell him to wait a few minutes." The D. A. hung up momentarily and turned to Dayton. "Deeming of the *Clarion*. I'll have him in, of course. Got to. But—you understand? He knows nothing about The Red—the Mrs. Villiers revelation—nothing except that Bancroft's wife is dead in Paris and it looks suspicious. For the rest, it may still be your meat, Dayton, if you work quietly along with me."

"Thanks," said the *Sentinel* man. As Jerrold turned to the telephone again, Dayton added: "Of course, as a newspaper man I'm disappointed in your decision. As between one man and another—I'm not."

Jerrold smiled wryly, but nodded appreciation.

Deeming of the *Clarion*, when he entered, betrayed surprise and disappointment at finding a *Sentinel* man already in possession.

"Oh—it's *you?*" said he sourly. "Thought you were honeymooning."

"Arranged a temporary separation," said Dayton lightly.

"Well, it's fifty-fifty this trip, brother. You can't cop off everything all the time."

"No," the *Sentinel* man conceded.

"I've got everything you've got to date," said Deeming to his rival, but with a challenging glance at the district attorney.

"You have, Mr. Deeming," said Jerrold calmly. "So don't quarrel over the bones. You have it all between you—so far. In brief: The French authorities have been requested by this office to hold an autopsy. Until a report on that arrives, just remember there's a law concerning libel. And the nearer the truth the bigger the suit, too! Be careful, gentlemen!"

Chapter XXXV

FEAR !

DAYTON and his rival left the Criminal Courts Building together. It took the *Sentinel* man about one minute to ascertain that Deeming knew no more than he had built up as a suspicion the moment his eyes had fallen upon that buried-at-the-bottom dispatch from Paris. But the *Clarion* man also surmised that Dayton and the district attorney were withholding something which these two shared in knowledge.

"How about working in combine?" Deeming suggested.

"No," said Dayton. "I can't. To be quite frank, the *Sentinel* is rather on the inside in this, has been all along, as you know. I can't trade its advantage."

"All right," said Deeming gloomily. "Well, how about agreeing that, as the other shops are not in the know, we hold out the story for our last editions? That would give the others no time to cover themselves with a rewrite."

"I can answer for the *Sentinel's* agreement to that," said Dayton. "Is it a pledge?"

"Yes, so far as it goes."

They parted on the best of mutual cutthroat terms, each to write the body of the story, which might not

be the head when it went to press. A dispatch from Paris might alter the whole face of the matter.

Unfortunately for Dayton, perhaps, and certainly for the ends of justice, Deeming, while agreeing to postpone publication until his paper's last edition, had said nothing about the *Clarion's* European edition, which came out in Paris three hours earlier through the difference in Greenwich time. Even at that, the Paris correspondents of American journals other than the *Clarion* did not pick up the latter's story, cabled to its Paris offices, in time to cable back a résumé for last-minute publication in such newspapers as had missed the significance of that first little dispatch. The Paris correspondents themselves had attached little importance to the "death" item sent by the more minutely industrious Associated Press. The Villiers case and its ramifications had been a purely local New York story to these foreign correspondents, who were prone to sniff at things local—and sometimes sniffed once too often.

But showing how the best-laid plans of justice may be utterly defeated by premature publicity, the one man in Paris whom the matter most concerned was among the first to read of it and to realize the significance of that story in the *Clarion's* European edition. And it was the last straw but one that broke the man's nerve.

For in Paris a drama was fast drawing to a curtain which fell in London.

The late evening which saw Richard Dayton and his bride in a Pullman drawing room found Bancroft in his room in a hotel in the Rue de Rivoli. A terrible

thing had happened to him—to his affairs, at least. His wife, Frances, whom he had married in London four months previously, had been found dead in her room that morning.

It was not that he was heartbroken for love's loss. He did not pretend to himself that he was, although he seemed a more or less shattered man to others. It was simply that she was—dead! She had not been well, of course. He had warned her, at first in Nice, then repeatedly in Monte Carlo, against the damnable habit—"robbing Peter to pay Paul," as he had described it. And she had had a weak heart, too, inherited from her late father. Had Bancroft forseen *this*, he would not have waited until occasional indulgence in the drug had become habitual enslavement. He would not merely have brought her to Paris for medical consultation and treatment. He would have taken the infernal little box away from her, with its tube and needle and its phial of little white tablets and hurled the whole contraption through a window. But, no—he had humoured her by permitting reasonable indulgence all the way from that gambling resort where, at first, she had turned day into night, then abolished time altogether in one continuous round of gambling, broken only by short naps and light meals made appetizing by numerous *apéritifs*, and then—falsely stimulated by the needle—to the tables again!

And now—she must have taken a heavier dose because it might be the last of her own election. The Paris physician, to be consulted on the morrow, would undoubtedly have deplored and cut down the dose and its frequency. A heavier dose, undoubtedly—heavier

than she had ever dared before—because it would be her last, for pleasure. It was the last for anything. A heart not too sound. . . .

This was the only way Bancroft could account for what had happened. She had not even committed suicide, although the authorities. . . . There was the trouble—the authorities! It was bad enough that she was dead, the wife he had reason to hope would live, whom it was his desire *should* live—for many, many years. He had no need to inherit her money. He had no wish to court further publicity in the probating of a third will disposing of that estate. And now Frances Kimball Villiers Smythe Bancroft had died on his hands—unexpectedly!—and the authorities were poking their noses into his affairs in a manner peculiarly and offensively French. If this thing got into the New York papers. . . .

“Damn the luck!” muttered Bancroft in that hotel room in the Rue de Rivoli. “Just like a woman——”

He checked himself. He must keep calm. Silly to accuse a dead woman of inconsiderately dying. But it was hard to take the accident calmly. Even now—he did not know—the tentacles of that octopus, the press, might have felt out the matter and found it interesting. Bancroft could not himself see how the matter could escape the Paris correspondents of American papers. It was quite an item, if they only knew it. An American woman of good family is found dead in her room. Her husband summons a physician, who responds, examines the body, seems to examine the husband at the same time, is unable to speak much

English, shrugs, says "*Mort!*" collects twenty-five francs, and departs. And ten minutes later two gendarmes and two police agents appear.

Like the physician, they speak little English. Bancroft speaks less French. They get an interpreter. Mr. Bancroft is informed that the body is to be removed to some other place, and he must accompany them to some place else—a magistrate's court. On his native earth Bancroft would have protested and possibly conjured laws compelling them to show cause—a warrant. But here—there was something about these French police. Perhaps it was their precise solemnity, taking everything for granted as if they were infallible. Perhaps it was their rapid and incomprehensible speech, or that Bancroft was unable to say anything that was comprehensible to them. The front of Jove became pallid, damp, and haggard. And a sudden qualm shot about the man's stomach and heart, a sensation he had never experienced before and did not identify as Fear!

But now that that first dreadful day was at an end and he was back in the hotel suite, he tried to collect himself, and succeeded to a certain extent. After all, had he understood the verbal exchanges, had he been able to follow them word for word, he would doubtless have recognized the procedure as merely routine. A woman—a foreigner—had died under not usual circumstances. The magistrate's court was making inquiries because a burial permit had had to be withheld, pending. The French doctor was of the opinion that the woman had died of poison. Whether administered

by another person, or taken with suicidal intent, or in an overdose which affected a possibly impaired heart. he was not prepared to say.

That was all. As was to be expected, the magistrate's court continued the hearing over until the following day, learning that the authorities had already taken charge of the body. But after that—the questioning of the husband by said authorities was what had reduced Bancroft to a condition of taut and frayed nerve strings. Yet that questioning had been natural enough, now that he considered matters in his room at the end of the day. Naturally, they had wished to know who his wife had been; her name, antecedents, state of health, habits, etc. Naturally, they had wished to know all about him, too: his name, business, recent movements, knowledge of his wife's health and habits; whether she had been rich in her own right; whether *he* was; whether she had children, or, having none, was he the natural inheritor of her fortune? etc., etc.

Trying, of course, to Mr. Bancroft, who could penetrate the Gallic mind better than he could follow the Gallic tongue. But that cut-and-dried, self-infallible manner of theirs!—as if everybody were guilty of something until proved innocent! Which was about all that Bancroft knew of French law, anyway.

He could not sleep. He got up and took from his travelling bag a small phial of tablets which he had once hidden from Frances. Why not? He supposed one tablet was a minimum dose. He swallowed one. The effect was rather pleasant. In half an hour he was asleep.

The second day was worse than the first. Perhaps because Bancroft did not feel physically comfortable. He had awakened with an unpleasant crawling sensation all over his skin. That tablet. He could perceive how, if another tablet would temporarily offset the crawly reaction of the first, a drug habit could easily be acquired.

Then, too, the matter was not swiftly disposed in the magistrate's court. There was an atmosphere Bancroft quickly sensed. As a lawyer, he was familiar with that atmosphere, of the something which has developed to lend new significance to a case. J. Loudon Bancroft suspected that this something grew out of a paper—it looked like a telegraph form—handed the magistrate by a sharp-eyed person in civilian clothes who arrived hurriedly and whispered with the presiding official.

The qualm around Bancroft's stomach and heart struck again like a pang of hunger, like a sickness of hunger. Now he knew it as Fear—especially when eyes glanced sharply, inquiringly, speculatively in his direction. And there was much whispering which the New York lawyer comprehended no more than he was aware of the significance of that message. He did not know that it was from the district attorney of New York, asking that an autopsy be held and a rigid inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. J. Loudon Bancroft—even exhumation, if burial had already taken place.

The French authorities did not need that suggestion from New York. What they were interested in was the American prosecutor's request at the end of the

message—that nothing be done to alarm Bancroft into attempted flight.

Net results: The magistrate's court ordered an autopsy to be held at the earliest possible moment, and Bancroft was courteously allowed to retire on his own *parole* that he would remain in Paris until matters were clarified.

At first he was elated. The unpleasant business was working out as he had tried to assure himself that it would. Why shouldn't it? He had nothing on his conscience—about Frances, at least. She had pricked herself with that needle once too often, that was all. The numerous minute marks on her thighs (she had never disfigured her arms for a very sufficient reason) would show that she had been addicted. Lucky that it was not a drug which she had been in the habit of swallowing. That might have raised a suspicion difficult of dispelling—that another hand had placed poison in her food or drink.

Everything was working out very well except—that paper looking like a telegram—and the whispered discussion over it. From whom? About what? Was it possible an item from Paris had filtered through the cables to New York? There were persons there who . . . That *Sentinel* man—what was his name?—for instance.

All at once Bancroft, in the act of lighting a cigar, started as if a bullet had whizzed by his ear. *So! That was it!* The thing he had feared ever since he had recovered from the shock of finding Mrs. Bancroft dead—had happened!

"Damn her!" he anathematized the dead woman. "She's done it!"

He pulled himself together, less shocked at himself than realizing that in such a speech he betrayed lack of self-control. With a shaking hand he finished lighting the cigar. He forced himself to be calm. He had bluffed smarter men than French detectives, who, after all were probably capable only in fiction. That was it, fiction! Gaboriau stuff! Ha!

Bancroft put on his tall hat, seized his gloves and gold-topped malacca cane, and left the hotel, sallying forth along the Rue de Rivoli as if bent on fresh air and the diverting interests of the boulevards. As he left the hotel, however, he thought that a man gave him a sharp glance and then looked away. Nervous imagination, of course! But half an hour later he saw the same man, sitting not far from him at a café where he had stopped for a stimulant.

An hour later Bancroft, walking warily about the streets of Paris, became convinced that he was being followed. That curious sickness of hunger again stabbed sharply. His pace quickened. He presently became aware that Paris was overrun by gendarmes—dagger-moustached, suspicious-eyed, evil-minded French police who seemed to be taking a special interest in *him*. Nonsense! They merely glanced at him. Hadn't *he* glanced at *them*? Perhaps his agitation, the rapidity of his pace . . . He must control himself. Everything was all right—except that telegram, and this man who was most certainly following. . . .

Dusk came. All Paris began to blaze. He had been back to the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli. Nothing

had happened there. What had he expected to happen? Nothing, of course. Only, he could not bear the vacuity of that room. He had expected to find that *something* had happened: a report on the autopsy, an end of this suspense. Nothing had happened! He could not stand that nothingness.

Once again he took to the streets. He knew now, of course, that he was under surveillance. Very well! He would give them exercise for their pains. He would show them that he, himself, was not worrying—merely seeking diversion from his “great sorrow.” He visited many cafés, drinking perhaps a little more than was his wont. He spent two hours over dinner—at Maxim’s. He patronized two of the gayest vaudeville entertainments, and about midnight, emerging from one of them, almost collided with that man again!

And now panic, which had been merely a first symptom of panic in the hotel, seized him as with claws. He had intended to return to the Rue de Rivoli and get some sleep. But now he was travelling without any sense of direction through the streets of Paris—seeking a way out and finding it a tightly walled city! Women spoke to him and he started back as if from attack. The sight of a gendarme standing half in shadow made him turn right about and almost run. And that which had been a pang about his stomach and heart was now a continuous gnawing ache. . . .

About three o’clock in the morning he arose from a seat in the Champs-Élysées, to which he had wandered some time before, sinking down exhausted physically and mentally. He suddenly realized that he was torturing himself, perhaps unnecessarily. He would re-

turn to the hotel, refreshen his jaded body and mind and nerve in sleep, and on the morrow trust to the luck which had ever been his. He *must* sleep.

A little later, at a corner near his hotel and under a bright flare, he saw a newspaper kiosk. Something to read—to divert him to sleep. There were always newspapers in English, London papers, European editions of—yes, there was the Paris edition of the *New York Clarion*. The man had just received his quota of copies and was arranging them on a rack. But Bancroft did not purchase one. He walked on to his hotel, seeing nothing but boldly printed words of a heading which seemed to travel with him, to dance in the air just ahead of him.

PARIS POLICE PROBE IN BANCROFT DEATH MYSTERY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S CABLE REQUESTS
BODY OF FORMER FRANCES KIMBALL
BE EXHUMED FOR AUTOPSY

“Jerrold!” Bancroft whispered hoarsely.

In a daze from shock he presently found himself opposite his hotel. He could see through the doorway into the brightly lighted office. Two gendarmes were at the office desk apparently questioning the clerk. The latter was shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head in an obvious negative.

The gnawing ache about Bancroft's stomach suddenly became a heart-clutching agony that deprived him of all but instinctive initiative. He turned and blindly fled!

It was a panting man who presently hailed a *fiacre* and gasped to the driver:

"*Gare du Nord! Quick!—Allons! . . .*"

Thirty minutes later he was lucky enough to be on a train bound for Calais. He felt, still, that eyes followed his every move, even when he reached the deck of the steamer for Dover, even at Dover itself, even at Charing Cross Station in London, even in the Hotel Delphine, which he chose because it seemed to be the most unlikely place he would elect ordinarily.

He collapsed into a chair in his newly acquired room a moment after the porter, retiring, had asked with surprise if he had no luggage at all. He was a wreck, physically, nervously, and nearly so mentally. He had nowhere to go, nowhere to turn. Frances was dead, the fool! No matter if the autopsy cleared him, as it should, the French police wanted him because of that cursed cablegram from New York. He had seen them in the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, awaiting his return. He had escaped before they knew he had taken alarm—to London. He needed breathing time. In London he could speak his own tongue if—— Yes, there it was! London might bring further inquisition. If the French police sought to detain a man to oblige the New York authorities, the London authorities—Scotland Yard—would do the same for the Paris police. Scotland Yard, the French Sûreté, the New York police! They worked hand in glove. So he had heard. London, too, was unsafe. He felt that he had not escaped the all-seeing eye of surveillance. At any moment they might come, heavy-footed, along that dingy corridor outside the door.

Where could he go? In his panic he had abandoned Paris with no more than the clothes on his body and the money in his pocket. It was a not inconsiderable sum. But how long would it last if he bought passage to—where? He could not go back to Paris for more funds. He dared not try to negotiate funds through London, betraying his whereabouts if it was not already known. He dared not go back to New York and face, if not the district attorney, the sneer on that surly surrogate's face. He could almost hear him say, "I once remarked, Mr. Bancroft, that your motives might not be above suspicion. Now here you are in court again to probate a will disposing of the same old estate—this time to you as sole heir and executor!" . . . And the newspapers—the filthy yellow rags! There was no telling what they might unearth—might have already unearthed!

Nowhere to go. . . . Paris was waiting to take him into custody, if for no other reason than that he had broken *parole*. New York might greet him with handcuffs. He had no money. He could negotiate none—safely. He was a prisoner where he was—a prisoner of circumstance—in London. Move anywhere, and in the end he would be arrested and sent back to New York, to be tried perhaps for—— He did not know just what had happened in New York to bring about that cablegram from Jerrold. He did not think it likely that they had captured The Red, or that, if captured, The Red would squeal. A man of his kind did not squeal, as a rule, except to save his own neck! Could that have happened? . . . Supposing The Red *had* squealed? He had a sudden

vivid vision of a trip up the river to a looming gray house, with a little door, behind which . . .

"God!" burst from his graying lips, while beads of perspiration gathered on his temples.

He sprang to his feet and clawed at his wilted collar. He felt himself choking—a strange thickening of his arteries—as if he were about to suffer a stroke. Or he was going mad! He could not stand the present. He could not face the future. The past—? Suddenly everything became of the past. The room was silent, save for the sound of his own hoarse breathing and—he could hear it!—the booming of his own heart. The room seemed all at once full of—Things! Things that whispered or laughed softly. There was an old woman limp on a park bench. There was a drunken youth sprawling prone on the entrance steps of an apartment house. There was a sallow worm of a man who said, "If anything happened to Smythe—?" There came a hoarse voice—The Red's voice—dully over a telephone one night in Henley's. And there was a still woman, a still-beautiful, still woman, who out of her own final peace of heart and mind whispered, "Don't be a fool, Jim!"

Frances! Yes, she knew how to stop this agony of nerves. But that little phial was in the travelling bag which he had abandoned with everything else at the hotel in Paris. It would have been too slow and uncertain a method, anyway, in emergency. For his mind was made up—on one point, at least. He would never be taken back to New York alive. Not if he could help it! And he need not be taken alive, if he were alert and swift in possible emergency. He was still a

free agent about that. The instrument of that free agency was in his hip pocket. He had never been without it, in recent years. He had had enemies—many enemies in his time. Had now—more than ever.

There came a sudden confusion of noise in the downstairs part of the Hotel Delphine. A woman—it had been a woman who offered him the register—a woman screamed! There came a pounding of feet, heavy feet. They came—heavily but swiftly—up the staircase. They came—heavily—like the approach of Judgment, along the dingy corridor. A heavy hand struck with authoritative sharpness upon the door of his room.

“You in there! Come out!” came like a summons.

“One moment!” Bancroft cried huskily.

Chapter XXXVI

"POSTSCRIPT EXTRA!!"

DISTRICT ATTORNEY JERROLD, his face preternaturally grave, was in the act of calling up Dayton of the *Sentinel* when that young man burst into the offices in the Criminal Courts Building without any intermediate ceremony. He was followed almost immediately by Deeming of the *Clarion*, and five minutes later by a small army of reporters from other papers.

"Keep 'em out, Jacobs!" said the D. A. to his attendant officer. "I'll talk to these two gentlemen first."

"Have you got it, officially?" asked the two gentlemen in unison.

"Yes," said Jerrold. "It's a disappointment. The bottom drops out of your story, gentlemen, and out of my case."

"You mean the story's got a top-story added!" cried the *Clarion* man excitedly.

"I think we must be talking about different things," said Jerrold with a puzzled expression. "What——?"

"*That's* just come through from London," Dayton interrupted, slapping down on the desk a sheet of Associated Press "flimsy."

"Good God!" exclaimed the district attorney, when he had read the dispatch.

"Can you beat it?" asked Deeming, while Dayton curiously watched Jerrold's face. Of course there was more in this than met the eye.

"Gentlemen," said the D. A. in an oddly solemn voice, "I'll read what you've brought to me—again. I'll read it aloud, slowly, as much to convince myself that I'm awake as to—to impress the sequel—I mean, something else—on your minds."

He read from the flimsy quietly and with just a touch of awe in his voice:

LONDON, May 13 (A. P.): A curious occurrence in connection with a minor fire alarm this evening at the Hotel Delphine, S. W. was the discovery, after other guests had returned to their rooms, of the body of a man believed to be J. Loudon Bancroft, of New York. Apparently not attempting to leave his room, he had shot himself through the head, the police state. His act is attributed to fear of being burned alive. The fire was extinguished within a few minutes of its start.

There was silence after the reading. Dayton's face was tense. He perceived suicide, of course, but more than that. How had the man come to be in London? Deeming, highly elated over prospects of much column space, was sitting back, ready with a pencil and pad for Jerrold's comment. When that comment came it was in the form of another reading, of a recently deciphered cablegram addressed by the French authorities to the District Attorney of New York.

PARIS, May 13: Bancroft autopsy reveals death from morphinism. Woman was addict. No case against husband, who was allowed to leave for London without official interference. He is now at Hotel Delphine, — Street, London, S. W.

Again there was silence, broken at length by Jerrold.

"You may copy this, gentlemen," he said, passing over the official dispatch from Paris. "This Villiers business is ended. Its mystery has solved itself. Conscience made a coward. Imagination prosecuted. Chance in the shape of a little fire alarm pronounced sentence. And Fear was the executioner."

It was late in the afternoon when Dayton and Deeming left the district attorney's office. Before the inrush of later newspaper arrivals was permitted Jerrold had squeezed the *Sentinel* man's arm and whispered:

"Lucky I didn't trade with Hirschel. I'll get my politician yet! And maybe you and I will get The Red to talk, somehow, so as to confirm the brilliant hypothetical story that's going to be in the *Sentinel* in the morning."

A weary but entirely satisfied Dayton sat down heavily on the edge of Mrs. Dayton's bed in his old rooms in West Forty-fifth Street about three-thirty o'clock in the morning. He smiled broadly as he showed his bride of less than three days the first spread head the *Sentinel* had used in years.

"And to-morrow, sweetheart," said Richard, "we'll try a fresh start on that honeymoon. They've extended the original two weeks to a month."

"Oh, I'm so proud!" said Margaret. "But," she added, "when we come back you're not going to work nights any more! They can always make you day city editor or something, can't they?"

In the House of the Two Green Eyes in the dingy side street off heedless, headlong Broadway—

"Well," said the Sphinx, polishing his glasses with a once-white handkerchief, "the Scripture saith an ending to all things must be." He had heard the main facts of the Villiers story climax from Barrie of the *Sentinel*. "Who gets the money now? Stealthy can't come back. And there's no one else."

"Maybe the state from which it was originally grafted by Tweed and his bunch that gave it to Belle Tremaine," Barrie ventured.

"What do *you* think, Sarge?"

"I ain't paid to think beyond this blotter," said Sergeant M'Gonigle, glancing at the clock and dipping his pen in the inkwell. Sergeants always did that.

The station-house cat yawned, stretched itself and solemnly circumnavigated the now fireless stove.

Outside the House, the lamps that were as two green eyes stared dully into the Tenderloin night.

THE END

